

## With or Without the TUC GENERAL STRIKE

Jack Conrad

THE 1984 TUC Congress coincides with the nearing of half a year that the miners have been on strike. In this time two miners have been killed, well over 5000 arrested, and countless other thousands injured, as NUM pickets face highly trained and coordinated bodies of police equipped not only with truncheon but with steel helmet, riot shield, and body armour — backed by cavalry charges and snatch squads as developed in the Six Counties.

For six months they and their families have lived from hand to mouth as the Tories attempt to starve them back to work. Their union has survived despite the splitting activities of traitors who through their scabbing have blunted and thus prolonged the strike. Some of these scabs have even resorted to using the bosses' courts in an effort to break the strike — a cause which many a leading capitalist has willingly and generously backed. And if all this were not enough, trade union leaders like Bill Sims have deliberately and cynically engaged in strikebreaking.

A defeat for the miners would be a prelude to an all out assault on the pay, rights, and conditions of all workers. That is why this year's TUC Congress should be an acid test for the rank and file's attitude towards the leadership of the trade union movement.

Of course, leaders of the EPTU, the AUEW, and the like will be fighting tooth and nail to ensure that any aid offered the NUM is worthless, that solidarity is voluntary. Well before the Congress Frank Chapple not only indicated his hostility to a measly 10p per member per week levy for the miners but showed the full extent of his desertion of the most elementary principles of trade unionism by bluntly declaring that his members would be expected to cross NUM picket lines if they were put up outside power stations.

But faced with millions of workers who back the miners, the determination of militants to strike with the miners, and Arthur Scargill's appeal for "total physical support," the TUC Congress looks like seeing the "new realism" of the '83 Congress, along with Chapple's rabid opposition to the miners' strike, his detestation of the willingness of miners to reply to the attacks by the police, and his near pathological hatred of Arthur Scargill's syndicalistic brand of politics, submerged if not drowned in a wave of militant rhetoric.

Unfortunately, all indications point to the militant rhetoric remaining nothing more than rhetoric. What concerns most trade union leaders is not victory for the miners. No, they want to see the whole thing settled as soon as possible — and to do this they are prepared to see a rotten sell out compromise. They fear real militant action like the plague; they have no stomach for it, all their training, their lifestyle, leads them to class collaboration not class war.

But despite these leaders the miners'



JOHN HARRIS

strike and the dire consequences of defeat demand that the working class be mobilised. Specifically, we have advocated that workers strike against their own employers alongside the miners in a united workers' offensive, which should have amongst its aims forcing the TUC to call a general strike in support of the miners and against the anti-trade union laws. Anything less is tokenism as it does not meet the needs of the hour. Talk about a one day strike and even the so-called big bang has everything to do with leaders wanting

to sound militant while offering no serious contribution to the war being fought by the miners. Demands for financial aid to the NUM, mass demonstrations in solidarity with them, respect for their picket lines are admirable but more is required to win.

So if the TUC Congress fails to take measures necessary for victory, what must we do? We say that the miners must not stand alone, that with or without the TUC a general strike is vital. This does not mean we must drop

our demands on the TUC, but it does mean that in the light of its do-nothing brand of treachery already experienced by the NGA, militants must develop alternative forms of organisation that do meet the needs of the class struggle. This can only be done if we break from the fetters of trade union routinism, if we learn from the rich history of our class — in particular from the example offered to us by the National Minority Movement of the 1920s which organised militants across union and sectional division. With this in mind we make the call for the founding of a National Miners' Support Movement, which should have a programme committing those who affiliate to class war and opposition to the treachery of new realism. The conditions are ripe for such a call; the NUM itself is in an ideal position to initiate such a movement by calling a national conference of all those who are prepared to take a serious stand alongside the miners, and who are prepared to fight to give them "total physical support".

A National Miners' Support Movement should draw upon not only the existing women against pit closure groups and the Miners' Support Committees — which must now be transformed into Council of Action type organisations — but working class organisations from national, district, and branch trade union organisations to rank and file committees. The call should be made over the heads of treacherous leaders directly to the militants of unions such as the EPTU, the AUEW, and the ISTC that they should organise independently of their leaders and that they should join the miners.

With such a perspective it is possible to see a broader body like the National Minority Movement evolving with great speed. Such an organisation would be in a position to attract the support of millions of workers who are at present suffering attack by the bosses and their Tory government. Such an organisation could break the isolation of militants, unite them into a powerful national force that could not only challenge the stranglehold the class traitors have over the TUC and most trade unions but provide the key to achieving victory for the miners.

We say:

- Call a national conference of militants who are committed to "total physical support" for the miners, something which must include the aim of a general strike if we are to achieve total victory.

- The local Miners' Support Committees must be transformed into Council of Action type bodies if they are to give "total physical support" to the miners. This means they should consist of recallable delegates from all local working class organisations. It also means they initiate the setting up of Workers' Defence Corps consisting above all of unemployed workers and strikers to protect demonstrations, meetings, and picket lines.



## THE LENINIST

### The 1,000 signatures

THE Communist Party Eurocommunist/McLennan dominated Executive Committee's campaign to call a Special General Meeting of the Peoples Press Printing Society by raising 1,000 signatures must be resisted by all genuine pro-Party communists. Under the slogan of "reclaiming our rights" the EC is in fact intent on laying the basis for capturing the *Morning Star* at the 1985 PPS AGM — not in order to further the struggle of the working class but in order to transform the paper into a daily version of that insult to the name of communism — *Marxism Today*.

Our opposition to the EC's campaign in no way means we support comrade Chater and his murky 'Survival Plan'. Both the Euros and Chater are thoroughly liquidationist, it is they who are responsible for the decline in the *Morning Star* and the Communist Party.

The possession of a daily paper is an invaluable asset for any Communist Party: under a Leninist leadership a daily paper is an immensely powerful weapon in the class struggle. But is the *Morning Star* worth saving if Chater gets away with handing it over to the left-reformist labour and trade union bureaucracy? Is it worth saving if the EC capture it? We say no! The fight to save the *Morning Star* must not be separated from the struggle in the Communist Party against liquidationism, for proletarian internationalism, and for Marxism-Leninism. Simply saving the *Morning Star* in the abstract in no way helps workers in struggle, in no way advances the interests of the working class. What is crucial is the political direction and content of the paper. That is why we fight to save the *Morning Star* for communism, not revisionism or reformism.

*The Editor*

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## LETTERS

### RCP Neglect the Miners

Having been very impressed with your paper *The Leninist* I'd be extremely grateful if you could forward on copies of the theoretical journal.

I take great pleasure in reading your publications which are rich with the essential Marxist-Leninist theory and historical content other comrades on the left tend to ignore!

At the recent summer school of the RCP in London I was introduced to your paper/journal and ideas. I found it so refreshing after listening to the naivety and ignorance of these inexperienced comrades whom you so rightly exclaim "separate themselves from the mass of class conscious workers" (the neglect they gave to the recent miners' dispute, their abhorrence of violence used against scabs) I fear they shall separate themselves from the very people they supposedly represent.

Through their obsession with the 'present' it's apparent they choose to ignore the gains working class history relishes in the past.

Yours in comradeship  
Jean Carr  
Glasgow

### Trotsky Again

Thank you for your reply in the July *Leninist*. The simple fact is that Trotskyism means world revolution while Stalinism means 'Socialism in One Country'. That is the origins of the split and that is where it stands today. A lot of events in between have not changed those programmes.

There is a fundamental reason why you have been forced to borrow from Trotskyism and to distance yourself from Stalin. The imperialist war drive has forced the Soviet leadership to reluctantly shelve detente. This has pushed parts of the abandoned, fragmented, crisis-racked communist parties to the left past the Soviet leadership which courts disaster by looking for a return to detente.

The near counterrevolution in Poland is only part of the handwriting on the wall. There is also a handwriting of a different sort from comrades like yourselves. The more detente is impossible, the more the Soviet leadership is forced to defend itself, the more Stalinism is found bankrupt. Have no illusions that the Stalinist officials fear workers' revolution more than imperialism.

Yes, Stalinist motion to the left opens up the opportunity for bolshevik-Leninists to win the leadership of the communist workers. Yes, the communist workers have been weaned for six decades on reformism and betrayal and there is a lot of sorting out to do. New ways, revolutionary ways that have been long forgotten, have to be re-established.

Arguments about the totally non-revolutionary conduct of your "world proletarian vanguard" in the potentially revolutionary situation in Britain and elsewhere today

are all too obvious. You have to stretch your imagination pretty far to describe the world's CPs as the "world proletarian vanguard". Certainly these comrades are an important element of a valuable cadre but only if they are regrouped into a vanguard party, which in Britain means a strikers' party. And you cannot do that with your muddle about how you "might agree with some of his (Trotsky's) criticisms", "criticise Stalin" (i.e. Stalin the man, but avoid the question of Stalinism), and "the long term interests of Poland". Proletarian revolution is the short interest and we haven't much time left.

Your argument that Stalinism retained a mass base despite its betrayals while Trotskyism has not despite the maintenance of revolutionary principles, is just a defeatist argument. It is soft Stalinist slander. It is the other side of the coin of the Moscow Trials which depicts the revolutionists as isolated and irrelevant.

Stop peddling the Stalinist cover-up that the CPGB in 1926 "was to the right compared with Comintern" in order to let Stalin off for holstering illusions by painting the TUC lefts red. Trotsky's call for the CI and CPGB to break from the TUC lefts was just as correct then as now.

If you do not want to be absorbed into the reformist camp whether it be social democracy or Stalinism, you'll have to come up with a clear explanation as to what destroyed the Bolshevik party and Communist International. If you really believe that what we have in Eastern Europe etc is "socialism" then the slogan of "reforge the Communist Party" will turn out to be just a temporary aberration. Evasions tucked away into reviews of one of EH Carr's books won't do.

If you will have the courage and political integrity to confront the issue of Stalinism head on I am confident that it will be instrumental in leading the comrades of the CP from their situation of unrequited love for the Soviet Union and back to bolshevik-Leninism which is in the short term the only defence of the gains of the October revolution, ie its revolutionary extension to the imperialist heartland.

Comradely,

Arnold Mintz  
London

### Ian Mahoney replies

This is Mintz's second attempt to brand *The Leninist* with the 'left Stalinist' label. It is interesting that our Trotskyite friend's second hite of the cherry should have degenerated to the level of such crude and empty generalisations.

Arnold for example genuinely seems to believe that it requires a "stretch of the imagination" of monumental proportions to accept the fact that the communist parties of the world are the "world's proletarian vanguard". Well, rather than overstretching your imagination friend we suggest that you use your memory. Tell us, was the Vietnamese Communist Party engaged in

"totally nonrevolutionary conduct" when it smashed US imperialist aggression and its puppet regime and went on to establish a socialist state? If then, as even some Trotskyites are forced to admit, Vietnam was a victory for the international proletariat, how does this square with Trotsky's assertion that the 'Stalinised' communist parties were "dead for revolution"? We are still waiting for anything like a coherent explanation of this inconsistency from any one of the multifarious Trotskyite groups we have encountered.

### With the Miners

Your paper is gratefully received and closely read. It's packed with both useful information and clear analysis, which is a welcome change from say the simplistic *Socialist Worker*, the pompous paranoid *News Line* or the classic Blanquist *the next step*. That goes without mentioning the outrageous gobbledy-gook that emanates from certain sections of your own mob. Yuk.

My solicitor has tried to get me bail and I've got another application coming up in September. He doesn't rate my chances that high. The interesting thing is that the sergeant who charged me has said that the main reason he's opposing bail is that I'm political. (That's a compliment indeed, since I was arrested with seven or eight miners!). As we know, there are no political prisoners in this country.

All the miners, and others present at my arrest have stated that I did not assault a policeman, let alone two...

Unlike most other journals who claim that widely acclaimed and widely misunderstood mentor, you have, at least, clearly read him (having said that I don't claim to have read most of his works). I'm definitely interested in future publications. I think your call for Workers' Defence Corps on the front page is well-timed.

Naturally I retain suspicions, maybe just because I've been around a bit, but as my introduction to politics was not through books I can keep paranoia out of it. But we seem to share a belief that the problem in our movement today is, tailism, sectarianism, resulting in paralysis. Yet the monolith shudders with contradictions.

What's got to be realised is that people are demoralised and pushed into individualism, whether politically passive cynicism or otherwise, by their experiences. It's easy to dismiss the multitude of 'lefts' and point to 'the workers' and comfort yourself with messianic destiny — often called historical materialism.

The essence of our struggle, whatever the analysis, is solidarity.

By the way, did you read that goon Jimmy Reid's article in *The Guardian*? Is he a workerist, an intellectualist, or just a w...? Although the answer is obvious I have visions of McLennan and Co practising their Lenin on the issue.

There is one issue about

# Notts Strike Leader Talks to *The Leninist*

**PAUL WHETTON** is the secretary of the NUM Strike Committee in the split area of Nottinghamshire. From this position he has been able to see not only the anger of many miners against the scabs in their own union but also the scale of police operations in that county. As he himself points out in the interview below, given to *The Leninist* at the beginning of August, the state itself recognises the key strategic importance of Notts in the struggle to defeat the NUM. Paul Whetton is thus the most important rank-and-file miners' leader in Britain today and we believe that his comments will be of great interest to many, both inside and outside the NUM...

your group which vexes me. It was touched on in the (well answered) letter from the true leftist comrade Mintz. It is highly possible that the cowardly leadership of the CPGB will expel your group and its closest supporters from the Party. They could do this by exploiting, in a hypocritical fashion, the 'Party loyalty' of the more principled old guard. No doubt you have thought of this one yourselves.

Yours in Solidarity,

Tim Watson,  
HM Prison Wakefield  
Polish Coal

In his article on 'Polish Coal' in your August issue, William Hughes quotes from my pamphlet *Soviet Trade Unions and the General Strike* giving instances of help given by Soviet trade unionists to the British miners in 1926.

It is made clear in the pamphlet that it was not the Soviet government but the Soviet trade unions that gave help to the British miners. In the same way, it is the Soviet seamen's union, not the Soviet government that has taken steps "to prevent coal and later oil deliveries" to Britain while the present dispute lasts. Governments deal with governments. They are not expected to support strikes of foreign workers in their own countries. It is the trade unions that are expected to show their international, proletarian solidarity by supporting their fellow workers in other countries.

Yet William Hughes seems to expect the Polish government to break its contracts in direct support of the British miners. Surely it is up to the Polish trade unionists to ban the transport of Polish coal destined for Britain. If there has been any correspondence or other form of communication between the British NUM and the Polish recognised trade unions on this subject, it ought to be published so that workers in other British industries can form their own conclusions.

In the meantime it would be more to the point if William Hughes criticised our own British trade unionists who are daily crossing picket lines and doing their utmost to sabotage the strike.

Yours fraternally,

Ernie Trory  
Sussex

British Coal

A proper critique of Scargill and the NUM bureaucracy is long overdue, after nearly five months of the miners strike, surely *The Leninist* has had the time to prepare the anti-capitalist arguments for militants to intervene in the miners' strike. It is not just a matter of scratching the surface with some criticisms of the opportunists on trade unionism, nationalised industries and the bourgeois state (*The Leninist* May '84), or criticisms of "our industry" (*The Leninist* July '84). It is a proper Marxist analysis and critique that is what is needed.

James McNamara  
Lewisham Miners  
Support Group.

Note: Letters have been shortened due to lack of space. For political security we have changed names and addresses, and certain details.

*The Leninist:* Have you seen much evidence of Communist Party activity around the strike in this area?

**Paul Whetton:** Yes, not a lot, but they've certainly been around. Some of the first to come forward with money for us were CP members and we've had regular donations from the CP and the New Communist Party, Nottingham branch. They haven't had the numbers obviously, but the support has been very good.

*The Leninist:* How long have you been on strike?

**Paul Whetton:** From day one, from March 12.

*The Leninist:* How many people came out that first day — was it just a dribble or was it initially fairly solid?

**Paul Whetton:** Well during the first week it was quite successful, quite a lot came out. At my own particular colliery, which is Bevercotes, pickets appeared and the pit was virtually stood that first week. But at that time it was like the domino theory, the Yorkshire lads came down from the North, they hit Harworth first then Bevercotes and passed on; and after a fairly successful first week they seemed to roll on into the counties, they went for Ollerton next then moved on. But a lot of our lads just went back after that first week.

## Leadership

*The Leninist:* Was there much of a lead from area or local level or was it a fairly spontaneous thing?

**Paul Whetton:** No, there was no lead from area level whatsoever. I mean the situation that has arisen over a long period of time is that of the four area officials two have come out for the strike, two have been against the strike. Unfortunately, the two that are pro the strike, Henry Richardson and Ray Chadburn, were not exactly quick and open with it in the first place. They were very late coming out and when they did come out it was very weak from the first instance and I think that created a lot of the problems with the rank-and-file. They looked for the leadership — I mean we missed Joe Whelan like we missed nobody — they looked for the leadership and it wasn't there. And in actual fact that's why we spent the first few weeks of the strike very disorganised and isolated and it wasn't until the fifth or sixth week that we started to get organised at a rank-and-file level.

*The Leninist:* Do you think there is any chance of getting working miners out at this late stage?

**Paul Whetton:** I think after this length of time there's no way we're going to shift them. That's realistic. I'd like to think that we could, but I think if someone has braved a picket line for twenty weeks then there's no way we're going to fetch them out now.

*The Leninist:* Has the drift back to work been a major problem?

**Paul Whetton:** It's been a problem,

but it has not been as bad as we initially thought. I mean, we had a week's holiday earlier on at Whit and we assumed that that was going to be bad, but it wasn't as bad as we feared.

*The Leninist:* How do you feel about the way the strike is being run in the solid areas, are too many decisions taken at area level without real rank-and-file involvement?

**Paul Whetton:** Actually I don't think they've done bad. But I look at it very parochially, I don't think they understand the problems of Notts, of being in a divided coalfield and the tremendous pressure that places on not just the men, but on the wives and on the kids and on the whole community. I think they tend to sit above the strike a little bit and not really get involved. Alright, it's not many General Secretaries or Presidents of unions that you see on the picket line and you've got to give Scargill credit for that.

Again I suppose it's part of the system, that national leaders, they're there and you're there and that's it. They fall into that trap, but it's still better than a damn sight many other unions on other disputes, but there is still that sort of division.

*The Leninist:* The majority of striking miners haven't been actively involved in the daily 'business' of the strike; mostly it has been a minority of 'hard core' activists on the picket line etc. How do you feel about developing the strike?

**Paul Whetton:** The point is that it is developing every day. I mean we thought it had really taken off when the dockers came out. Then the dockers went back. Now if they take this action against the South Wales miners that may or may not put the heat back into the situation. And trying to look forward to the TUC and the call for a general strike is obviously what we've got to be looking at. We're not going to pull the lads out who've been going through that picket line after twenty weeks and so we've got to look at what's the next stage and what's the role of the strike. It's got to be looking forward to a general strike and the call for a general strike. There are great difficulties: one of the difficulties is that no bastard trusts the TUC — we just don't trust them. I mean the TUC are the last people we want to go to but having said that, we recognise that in the end we've got to go to the TUC but when, on whose terms, and who controls are the real questions.

## Rank and File

*The Leninist:* Doesn't that re-emphasise the need for a rank-and-file movement within the strike, not simply in the NUM but across industries? That would not only go some way towards solving the problem of involving more miners in the actual running of the strike, but also be an effective safeguard against a sellout in the event of a general strike.

**Paul Whetton:** It's something

we've looked at. We've had some quite good talks with some of the rank-and-file lads from the NUR and ASLEF. It was something that we were looking at two or three weeks ago, perhaps the calling of a rank-and-file meeting and encompassing the basic industries that were under attack like the railways, the pits, British Steel, the docks, all those that were under attack and threat of privatisation. We were talking about involving British Telecom and all the rest of it.

The idea has been mooted that perhaps it might be as well to do it in a two stage way. That a very small local rank-and-file committee or something like a work school be set up to begin with and that we then start to make it bigger and try to encompass some of the other unions because whether we like Bill Sirs and the ISTC or not, there are still good lads in the ISTC. It's not fair to just totally write the ISTC off because of the activities of Bill Sirs and the same with many more trade unions.

It may well be that it's got to be some sort of rank-and-file committee that is sitting in constant session but with the right of total recall on the members you put on it.

## Mass Picketing

*The Leninist:* How do you feel about the tactic of mass picketing in view of the police's well organised and almost paramilitary response to the dispute?

**Paul Whetton:** I still think it is a fair tactic. What happened in '72 at Saltley Gate was that the police had to pack in and march away, and when they did that it was a humiliation not just for the actual officers but for the police force and the government, and when that police force marched away they vowed and declared that that would never happen again. Since then they've been working away at it slowly. We had '72 and '74 and the miners said 'Oh we've got it cracked, all we've got to do is threaten and everybody jumps', we sat back and we let things roll over us. They have been grinding away, slowly but surely, they've been setting their organisation up and tinkering with the laws here and there, doing this and that, but everything all pointed in the same direction — that someday there was going to be a showdown.

In 1981 they had to do a U-turn with the Welsh miners and they said 'we weren't ready', that was the top and bottom of it. Then they had the NGA dispute and then they had GCHQ and nobody did a thing so then the Tories said 'right we've got it cracked, we're ready to take the miners on.' They deliberately escalated the overtime ban into a strike and have been ready for it. There's nobody can convince me that the government can go and pick ten thousand coppers up from all over the bloody country and just plunk them into the middle of Nottinghamshire

continued overleaf...

## Interview

... continued

without them having done a hell of a lot of homework and preparation for it. In the first place they knew Nottinghamshire would be an 'iffy' area, though I don't think they expected the large numbers that did come out in the early days. I mean, we at one stage had ten thousand out on strike in Notts and it went as high as twelve and possibly higher still. That really gave them headaches in so far as they had got the borders secure against the Yorkshire and Derbyshire lads but here were ten thousand swimming around inside Notts.

**The Leninist:** The enemy within?

**Paul Whetton:** That's right, the enemy within. They had to adapt their tactics and they have done. First of all they sealed off inside Notts but we got round that because most of them didn't know the backroads, most of them still bloody don't know anything other than the main roads. What they've got now is a sort of large mobile force that is evenly distributed about the area and as soon as patterns of traffic are seen or pickets over the norm, then that's where they go. They've got a sort of flying picket police-style that's floating around the county. They've been very good at adopting tactics, a lot of the lads are normal everyday working class lads, they don't understand the differences between civil and criminal law and the police try it on...

The thing about violence is that from day one the coppers were carrying riot gear. I mean that in itself was intimidation and an invitation to say 'come on we want a go at you bastards.' A lot of the violence is a reaction to the police tactics and a lot of it is frustration and all the rest of it. What you very rarely see on the TV is the police initiatives in dishing the violence out. Most of the running battles that are shown on the television are merely the lads trying to protect themselves or doing what they see to be right. I've seen it especially in London, outside the House of Commons, at the last big rally, they've been pushing and shoving at one another and it's like a bit of a game you know 'you push and I push and it's your turn next.' But if those lads had been determined enough they could have taken that bloody street, they could have taken it. But they went forward and there's that hesitation before going in full, whereas the coppers don't.

If we had a guy break ranks from us and he charged up to a line of coppers and pulled a truncheon out and started walloping one over the head, perhaps he'd get his stick out but he wouldn't get any further, he'd be flattened. But the opposite is totally true, that the coppers can come up to you, they can do that and of course they've got the full backing of the law.

## Workers' Defence Corps

**The Leninist:** Don't you feel that the essential difference between the two sides, the missing ingredient which produces that fatal 'hesitation' you spoke about, is the question of organisation — whereas the police are trained the pickets are not.

**Paul Whetton:** That's certainly true. We've got lads at the pit who've served in Northern Ireland and have said that the tactics of a snatch squad, dressed in lighter gear not so heavy body armour underneath, that go in, snatch the victim and out again, are the same. There are two or three of the lads who know quite well what the tactics are.

Most of our lads aren't dedicated towards violence as the police are. To the police it's bread and butter but to the normal working man it isn't. If there is a criticism that we've got to level against our lads it's that they're too bloody soft and they're too honest and in actual fact they should have been dishing out the dirt since week one.

**The Leninist:** We have argued in our paper for the organisation of trained Workers' Defence Corps to protect picket lines etc. as happened during the 1926 general strike. Do you feel that the military operations of the police

require a military response?

**Paul Whetton:** Whether or not we could actually organise that I don't know. I mean yes we do need a protection group, but again one of our problems is numbers: that it is one in four that will actually come out and go on the picket line and if Yorkshire or Derbyshire do send some lads into Notts they've got to send four to get one in. So that your forces in the first place are cut down by three-quarters...

I mean people say we've been getting ready for this strike for a long time and some of us obviously knew what was coming, it could be seen, it was clearly on the cards, and we knew that sooner or later it would happen and that these sort of experiences were bound to happen. But it is very difficult to convince the ordinary working bloke that there's something just over the horizon and you've got to be ready for it and you start talking about arming them up even if you're talking about pick shafts which is fair enough, it's what the Irish did with hurling sticks, I mean you'd get laughed out of the bloody Welfare. Whilst some of them may say 'well yeah we could see it coming' again they're too honest, they're too fair, they assume that everybody's going to play according to the same rules, they assume that the state will, alright play a few dirty tricks, but that's as far as they'll go. I mean we haven't even begun to see what the bloody state's capable of yet in this dispute, they have far more tricks up their sleeve: the water cannon, the rubber bullets, they're all there ready, whether or not it'll reach that stage...

## Women

**The Leninist:** One of the most impressive aspects of the strike has been the high profile of women. Have you noticed any development in the role women have played in the strike?

**Paul Whetton:** It's been very interesting to watch the development of the women. In the first instance it was more or less soup kitchens, you know 'women's work', that was laid on them. But then many of them began to realise it wasn't just a matter of being a wife in a soup kitchen, they wanted to actually get out on a picket line and to watch the development of them has been quite interesting, they have organised well. They still have problems and wrangles and again it comes back to the question of living in a split community. The difference between, let's say Kent, Yorkshire or South Wales, and Nottinghamshire is that when you live in a solid striking community you're all in the same boat, you've all got the same problems, you lean on one another.

Half the kids round here don't play cowboys and Indians they play scabs and pickets in the school yard. The wives when they go down the street have got to be very careful who they talk to and who they don't talk to. And to go into a shop and the woman in front of you slaps £10 on the counter and asks for a leg of lamb for the Sunday dinner and you're scraping about in the bottom of your purse for a few coppers for a bit of mince, you know. All that sort of thing is additional pressure on top of the pressure wives have of getting up in the morning making breakfast for pickets, going out and joining pickets on the picket line, coming back and making dinners for pickets, going out and organising bring and buy sales and raffles and god knows what fund raising, going to meetings at night and still having time to look after the family — all that is tremendous pressure. It shows, it erupts in rows and differences over petty little things, you know they've got to be argued out and they do, they argue them out quite well. But it's very, very difficult...

**The Leninist:** Has there been a change in miners' attitudes towards women during the course of the strike?

**Paul Whetton:** Oh yes, one hell of a change. You have to recognise that mineworkers never come across female contact in the work context. They

might see the odd woman in the canteen, but that's it; they never see them in a trade union role, they see a few in perhaps Labour Party or CP meetings something like that. And for men in the mining community who've got the traditional picture they think back to their own mothers and all that they can remember is that mother was virtually tied to the kitchen sink and the stove 24 hours a bloody day and that she didn't have time to go out standing up at meetings and pronouncing judgements on politics. And that was the view and still is among some despite the tremendous work the women have done.

But a lot of the men came to recognise and admit that yes, a woman's place is on the picket line and they readily recognised the hard work that they'd done. Some of them were surprised that women could actually do these sort of things. It's certainly done the women good, it's certainly opened the men's eyes and I would hope that even if this dispute was settled tomorrow that that sort of thing needs to go on. Women need to be able to continue organising, not just in relation to strikes and disputes but actually having a full role to play in society whether it is in industrial disputes or just ordinary day to day living. Whether that will happen or whether it will just be back to the kitchen sink or not I don't know; I think that would be a retrograde step and I would imagine that a lot of women are going to do a lot of hard work to make sure that it doesn't.

## Polish Coal

**The Leninist:** For our section of the Communist Party it is a crime that Polish coal is continuing to be exported to Britain in the miners' strike. How do you feel as a striking miner about the actions of socialist Poland?

**Paul Whetton:** You've got to realise that with Solidarity, anything the church has got its dirty little paws in I'm suspicious of immediately. I mean we made ourselves very unpopular by saying so at our branch meetings, we had meetings when Solidarnosc first got off the ground and we had Poles and second generation Poles and moderates and all sorts getting up and praising Solidarity down to the bloody ground. It was on pure political grounds that we were making our criticisms while accepting a lot of the stuff that was there. All they were arguing about was highly emotive and absolutely nothing to do with the bedrock arguments about Solidarity. We were saying at that time that if Arthur Scargill started to make the same demands as Lech Walesa he'd finish up in jail never mind with a bloody peace prize.

I recognise yes, Poland is a socialist country but it's still got a lot of criticisms to be laid at it. Trying to look at it unemotionally, Poland's got problems with its balance of payments and its economy etc, and an opportunity to sell coal would seem to quite a lot of them to be an ideal opportunity to what seems to be a downward spiralling chute. I think a lot of them took the temptation and said here we are we've got a chance to break into markets, even if we don't hang onto them, we can secure them in the short term and we can solve a hell of a lot of our problems at the same time.

We understand that a great many of our comrades in the pits will be producing that coal knowing full well it's coming into this country and it may well be that there is a fierce debate going on in Poland, I don't know, but I would imagine that there is a great deal of debate going on in Poland about the rights and wrongs; that is assuming that they are being told all the facts, it may well be that a certain amount of bureaucratic flim flam will be put in the way of the debate in order to make sure that it doesn't flare up.

I've got a certain amount of sympathy with them but having said that the basic argument is that they must know coal is being exported to this country, they know that there is

a miners' strike on, and they know that by sending that coal they are strike breaking. I think that it is the fault of the leadership and the bureaucracy, that there isn't enough contact between the rank-and-file in this country and the rank-and-file in Poland. I'm sure that had we the ability to send rank-and-file miners to talk to rank-and-file miners and other trade unionists in Poland the volume of coal wouldn't be anywhere near as great.

## General Strike

**The Leninist:** You say there is no way you are going to be able to get the rest of the Notts coalfields out, so how are you going to win?

**Paul Whetton:** I think it's got to be a general strike. When the dockers came out that absolutely put the shits up the authorities, they bent over backwards, they bought off the NUR, they bought ASLEF off and they've bought the dockers off. I mean it may well be that the dockers are quite happy with the short term benefits that they've got out of it; I still think they were sold out. I still think that all they've got is an immediate short term benefit that might look very rosy now but when the miners' dispute is over and they've got to go back and talk again, it might well be that they've missed the boat, I'm certainly sure that a good many trade unionists are going to say over the next twelve to twenty four months 'By god I wish we'd gone when the miners had gone.'

At this forthcoming TUC obviously there's going to be a great debate, I would hope that the rank-and-file will take that debate up and not allow the TUC again to be used as a bloody sellout agency, because that's all it is, it's another pillar of the establishment and they like it very nicely, thank you very much because they do very well out of it. It has got to be a general strike, a general strike that's organised, run by and controlled by the rank-and-file. Whether or not we're going to be allowed to do that I don't know because I believe that if the TUC see that we or any section of the workers are beginning to grab the initiative they will want to step in and say 'Well thank you very much, you've done very nicely up to now, we'll take the reins from here.' That's as big a danger as anything else, that they may well come along and say: 'Oh yes, we agree with you; a general strike' and then call half a day, if you feel like it — you know, that sort of appeal.

The general strike is the only answer, and not a bloody one day or half a day. It's got to be said that until certain assurances are given, and that's why it's got to be not just the miners but along a whole range of industries, that the railwaymen, the steelworkers, the dockers, the car-workers and all the other sectors of the basic industries of Britain have got to say look we've got a gripe and until these gripes are all sorted out then there is no way we are going to consider going back.

It's going to be one hell of a demand and there is no way British capitalism is just going to sign a piece of paper and say well there you are. There will be fierce resistance but I believe that if we can heat the situation up enough to get that call for a general strike it may well be that the bureaucrats in the TUC are in charge of a horse that they cannot control and the only people that can control it are rank-and-file members who are aware of what's going on, in touch at a grass roots level, and subject to the right of total recall so that nobody's going to build a career up for himself or he'll feel himself snatched back by the seat of his pants and told 'get back in your place and you know where your place is and we'll get somebody else.' I believe that's important as well.

Any messages of solidarity or money raised to assist the struggle in Notts should be sent to Paul Whetton, Secretary — Notts Strike Committee, 10 Nicholas Place, Tuxford, Newark, Nottinghamshire, NG22 0HU.

## THE LENINIST Supplement

# Communists, Classes, and Alliances

John  
Mann

BRITAIN is entering an era of class polarisation and class war. This generally stems from imperialism's renewed slide into general crisis, a period of wars, revolutions and economic collapse, which mankind last experienced and suffered during 1914-1948, when imperialism unleashed two monstrous world wars at the cost of almost a hundred million dead and maimed. Britain, then, stood as the world's most powerful imperialist country, the centre of a vast and rich empire, from which it drained resources and superprofits by exploiting and oppressing over three hundred million inhabitants of colonial Africa and Asia. Yet today, British imperialism is visibly in decline and decay. The inability of the imperialist bourgeoisie to counter the laws of capitalist development with the cushion of that once mighty empire or the prosperity of the now exhausted postwar boom, is radically changing the once stable landscape of British politics.

One of the most important developments in the political sphere resulting from British imperialism's decline and decay, is the emergence of a crisis of reformism. The cost of social reforms and the welfare state, rising living standards and liberal democratic rights is now considered by the bourgeoisie to be too great, if capitalism in Britain is to remain viable and competitive in the world market. Consequently, over the past fifteen years, both Labour and Tory governments have begun to conduct a concerted offensive against the trade unions in an attempt to impose wage controls and restrictive legislation such as *In Place of Strife*, the Industrial Relations Act and the present Pridmore and Tebbit Acts, in order to drive down living standards. Furthermore, fierce cuts have been imposed on public spending in the nationalised sector of industry as well as in welfare benefits and facilities for health, education and for the unemployed. This is especially the case with the incumbent Thatcher government, which is fighting viciously for the defence and preservation of capitalism and is brutally batoning down on all resistance in the streets by equipping the police with firearms, riot gear and shields, and ensuring that they can be moved from one end of the country to the other in large numbers.

For the reformist leaders of the trade unions and the Labour Party, the ability to channel discontent between the safe banks of parliament has been seriously undermined by the Labour Party's unprecedented and devastating defeat in the 1983 general election with half their vote defecting to the SDP/Liberal Alliance. This has effectively brought to an end the postwar period of consensus politics, in which Labour and Tory governments alternated, both implementing Keynesian policies of economic expansion and class conciliation, and both ruling over a relatively passive labour movement and population.

Yet today, the rising anger and frustration of the working class is flowing over into extra-parliamentary movements and mass actions. The trade unions are having to conduct

longer and more bitter struggles to have any chance of winning concessions on wages and conditions and preventing job losses. The miners are engaged in the largest, most important and strategic battle for the working class since the general strike of 1926, having already held out for six months and confronted the police thugs on the picket lines with no liberal and legalistic qualms about using violence. Hundreds of thousands have filled the streets in protest against the stationing of Cruise and Pershing II missiles in Britain, which are aimed at the Soviet Union and designed to give US imperialism the strategic capacity to win World War III. Women now make up nearly a half of the employed working class and the question of women's equality — social, economic and political — has become a burning issue for the working class as a whole. Black people are no longer prepared to accept second class citizenship, or suffer brutal attacks and harassment by fascists and the police, having already shown their determination to fight back during the Summer Riots of 1981. And the bourgeoisie can no longer pretend that the nationalist population of Northern Ireland does not support the IRA.

This new turn in British politics, in which the most reactionary Tory government since World War II, seems entrenched in power for the duration of the 1980s and 1990s; in which the Labour Party looks condemned to relive its pre-1945 role of being in virtual permanent opposition; and in which new forces and movements are emerging outside of the Labour Party and parliament, has given rise to a debate among communists in the columns of *Marxism Today* and the *Morning Star* around the question of alliances. This issue was first raised by the renowned Eurocommunist and professor of history Eric Hobsbawm in his 1978 Marx Memorial Lecture *The Forward March of Labour Halted?*, in which he formulated the hypothesis that the traditional trade union and labour movement had suffered a longterm decline due to the changing composition of the working class. With the intervening experience of the Thatcher government entering its second term, the dramatic formation and rise of the Social Democratic Party and the crisis within the ranks of Labourism, this debate has been given added impetus by Hobsbawm's disguised proposal that a Labour/SDP/Liberal Alliance should be seriously considered, if Thatcher and the Tories are to be removed from office.

The question of alliances has become the subject of bitter controversy among communists, because not only has the Communist Party not remained unscathed by the crisis of reformism, but has on the contrary, been severely mauled, losing over half its membership in ten years and becoming rent by ideological differences and splits. The crux of the Party's crisis is that the reformist perspective outlined in its programme *The British Road to Socialism*, of achieving socialism through a parliamentary and governmental alliance of Labour and communists, look ever more incredible than before. Having made very little progress over the past thirty years in consummating their parliamentary dreams and illusions, the Party's three

major opportunist factions have openly fallen out with each other as to the merits of one reformist scheme leading to Communist Party liquidation as against another. The ensuing debate on alliances, moreover, has graphically illustrated the extent to which they have all sunk into utter servility and abject subservience towards Labourism in particular, and liberalism in general.

The Chatter group at the *Morning Star* has become virtually indistinguishable from left Labourism and the left reformist trade union leaders, to whom it looks for salvation from declining sales of the paper. It has invited the likes of Tony Benn and Ernie Roberts onto its platform in support of the so called 'Survival Plan', which projects a liquidationist course of divorcing the *Morning Star* from communist politics in return for finance from the official trade union movement.

*Straight Left*, a centrist faction posing falsely as the 'hard left' opposition, has long promoted reformist broad left alliances through its monthly liquidationist paper, but has distanced itself recently from the more over anti-Party utterances of their left Labour patrons. It does this, not to expose the interest shared by both left and right Labourism in the dissolution of the Communist Party, but to disguise its own liquidationist Labourophile sycophancy with a hollow and belated ruse of sham pro-Partyism. They therefore jokingly explain Ernie Roberts' support for a non-communist *Morning Star* as the act, not of a left reformist, but of a Trotskyite! But *Straight Left*, as with the Chatter group, still continues to sustain illusions in the Labour Party, by supporting the reformist strategy of a communist/Labour government.

The Eurocommunists have reacted to Labour's rout in last year's general election by rapidly moving even further to the right. They have declared their support for the Kinnock bloc inside the Labour Party and have called for a retreat from the policies of the Bennite left to more moderate ones. The Eurocommunists have, moreover, rejigged Popular Frontism, (which Santiago Carrillo rightly claims as the "antecedent of Eurocommunism") in order to lend credence and 'orthodoxy' to their proposal for an 'anti-Thatcher' coalition government of communists, Labour and the Alliance.

To conceal its thoroughly reformist nature, *The British Road* defines reformism as being "based entirely on the ballot box"; so apart from supporting parliamentary alliances, it also develops the idea of an extra-parliamentary alliance known as the broad popular alliance in the 1951 edition, as the antimonopoly alliance in the 1969 edition and as the broad democratic alliance in the 1978 edition. In essence, these alliances, whether in the sense of gaining the support of petty bourgeois tradespeople and the clergy for the struggles of striking miners and the unemployed, or in the context of uniting the working class with the middle strata in the peace movement and the women's movement, are still reformist. Nowhere does *The British Road* or any of the three opportunist and liquidationist factions claim that the precondition of such alliances must be the support for the

revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist state. In fact the reformist concept of alliances has been established and gone unchallenged in our Party for so long, that the orthodox Marxist-Leninist and proletarian revolutionary attitude has been almost completely buried.

In this article, we will therefore attempt to reestablish the Marxist-Leninist position on the question of alliances by examining and countering the reformist concepts and arguments of all the opportunist factions in the recent debate. Let us first look at the general question of the socialist revolution and the struggle for democracy.

### Democracy

In 1916, Lenin stated the following: "The socialist revolution is not a single act, it is not one battle on one front, but a whole epoch of acute class conflicts, a long series of battles on all fronts, i.e., on all questions of economics and politics, battles that can only end in the expropriation of the bourgeoisie. It would be a radical mistake to think that the struggle for democracy was capable of diverting the proletariat from the socialist revolution or of hiding it, overshadowing it, etc. On the contrary, in the same way as there can be no victorious socialism that does not practice full democracy, so the proletariat cannot prepare for its victory over the bourgeoisie without an all-round, consistent and revolutionary struggle for democracy." (*CH*, Vol. 22, p.144)

This would seem to be a statement that the opportunists, even the Eurocommunists, could concur with, yet there is just one word which sharply differentiates the Leninist attitude towards the democratic struggle and the opportunist attitude. That word is "revolutionary". For Lenin, the working class must wage a determined struggle for democratic demands "... in a revolutionary and not a reformist manner, going beyond the bounds of bourgeois legality, breaking them down, going beyond speeches in parliament and verbal protests, and drawing the masses into decisive action, extending and intensifying the struggle for every fundamental democratic demand up to a direct onslaught on the bourgeoisie." (*Ibid*)

Unlike the opportunists in our Party, who seek to maintain the struggle for democracy within the confines of bourgeois democracy and legality, to make it acceptable to the bourgeoisie, Lenin makes the democratic struggle waged by communists hinge upon the central axiom of revolution. It is on this basis that Lenin justifies democratic alliances between the working class and other classes. In Russia, where capitalist relations in general remained backward and retarded by Tsarist absolutism and where the content of the revolution was essentially democratic, Lenin developed the strategy of allying the proletariat with the peasantry in a revolutionary movement to overthrow Tsarism. He vehemently opposed, however, the Menshevik strategy of forming an alliance with the bourgeoisie, a class also formally opposed to Tsarism, but committed

Party must form an electoral coalition with the Alliance. The Eurocommunists are committed, not to a revolutionary people's alliance in which democratic demands necessitate revolution but to a reformist alliance between the working class and the middle strata, both inside parliament and outside. This is the essence of the broad democratic alliance.

The reflex reaction of comrades on the left of the Communist Party, as they attempt to counter the Eurocommunists' clearly visible reformist and petty bourgeois liberal strategy, leads them into confusion and fundamental error. Comrade John Rees writes in a letter to the *Morning Star*:

"Why are Marxists concerned with the question of alliances? The answer lies not in some moral desire to create universal love, but in the concrete problem of how we replace capitalist power with workers' power.

"... (the workers) must politically realise their own economic rights and strength, and on that basis attract the people as a whole to their banner. Here the key question of alliance-building is raised.

"As Dave Cook suggests (October 18), politicisation can occur through one's perception of oppression rather than through one's perception of exploitation, but the perception of one's oppression will not lead to the political activity required to kick the capitalists out.

"However, the realisation of exploitation and what one can do economically and politically about that social fact does lead on to the central political problem: how we change the power order in capitalist society.

"... I would suggest that the unity of our working class, the building of a revolutionary cadre in that class, and the positioning of a Socialist alternative to the vast mass of the British people are rooted in that appreciation of power politics.

"However, Dave Cook's unscientific broad democratic alliance is snatched from the swirling mist of confusion in order to cover up the writer's pre-Marxist longing for a democracy which never even existed in the revolutionary democratic days of 1848." (*Morning Star* October 31, 1983)

Comrade Rees correctly addresses the question of alliances as one of state power, but then fatally plays down "democratic demands" and falls into the open trap of economism. If other classes exist in Britain, which can be won to form a revolutionary alliance with the working class, then there is no other basis for this but a *democratic one*. There is no bourgeois, petty bourgeois or semi-bourgeois class within the ranks of the middle strata — and we are not talking about the individuals who are won ideologically to support the working class and communism — but a whole class, that can be won to support revolution on the basis of the economic interests of the working class. Neither is the dictatorship of the proletariat simply a political expression of realising working class economic rights. It is also about politically suppressing all rights of the capitalist class as an exploiter class, and raising democracy for the masses to a far higher degree than can possibly be achieved under capitalism. So long as there are differences between nationalities men and women, black and white, which lead to social inequality, even in a socialist society, then democracy must be extended to overcome those differences, until the communist basis of society is sufficiently ripe to enable democracy to whither away with the state. If the working class is to raise itself to become the ruling class, then the revolutionary struggle for democratic rights will be as important for the working class in Britain today, as it was "in the revolutionary democratic days of 1848". Simply because

the Eurocommunists reduce every democratic demand down to the most vulgar reformism, this is no reason for us to lose sight of the absolute necessity of democratic demands in the socialist revolution.

The question we must really ask comrade Rees and ourselves, however, is: Does there exist in Britain a potentially revolutionary petty bourgeoisie or middle strata? Is comrade Rees correct in believing that such classes other than the working class constitute part of "the people" in Britain?

The middle strata in Britain are not a class like the petty bourgeoisie or peasantry of backward countries dominated by absolutism or of nationally oppressed countries, but are a class spawned by ruling capitalism to be its privileged and well paid servant. It is fundamentally a class whose interests are economically and politically integrated with the interests of the bourgeoisie. Its privilege is derived from the capitalist ownership of the means of production, from which it receives an ample share of the surplus value in salary form; and from the division of labour, which the capitalist state seeks to perpetuate. The middle strata has no class interest in the construction of communist society, as this would reduce it to the same level as the working class with the disappearance of classes altogether. Of course, the middle strata would continue to exist under socialism so long as the division between intellectual and manual labour existed, but under socialism, it would not be the servant of the bourgeoisie, but of the dictatorship of the proletariat instead. The role of the working class in the socialist revolution in Britain is to smash the rule of monopoly capital and paralyse the instability of the middle strata.

Although Britain is a country, in which even the working class has traditionally been dominated by the reformism and class treachery of the labour bureaucracy and aristocracy, the reformism of the middle strata is different. The basis of reformism in the working class movement is the ability of imperialism to exploit the world as a whole. Imperialism's ascendancy is being undermined, partially by the emergence of a socialist world system, which limits the free access of imperialism to resources, trade and exploitable labour within the socialist countries; but is also undermined by decline and decay, as is the case in Britain, where imperialism becomes more reliant on the world market for profits, but is increasingly unable to maintain its share in the face of more vigorous and competitive imperialist rivals.

The basis of reformism in the middle strata, however, is capitalism in general, and only when the working class transforms the professional and managerial intelligentsia into its own servant for the construction of socialism will the basis of bourgeois reformism in the middle strata be removed.

Finally, is there "a national question" in Britain and could the middle strata in Scotland and Wales not become revolutionary in the same manner as the petty bourgeois Republican movement of Ireland? Scotland and Wales are different from Ireland, in that the English bourgeoisie long ago integrated both countries economically and politically into Britain. The majority of both populations are working class, and see themselves as part of the traditions and mass movements of the working class in Britain as a whole. There is no question of there being a parallel with Northern Ireland, where despite the majority of the population being Loyalist, it is the rights of the people of Ireland as a whole which must be considered.

Apart from a very small section or fringe of the middle strata, as represented by the petty bourgeois revolutionary left groups, the middle strata is not a class which can be won to a revolutionary alliance, but will remain firmly wedded to the bourgeois

parties and especially bourgeois reformism. Only the working class has an objective interest in the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist state, and as the overwhelming majority of the population, is the only class which will constitute the "people" and is the only class which we communists should strive to draw into mass action, to carry through the socialist revolution. Our task in relation to the middle strata must be to neutralise it, paralyse it and prevent it from supporting the counterrevolutionary forces of monopoly and finance capital.

### Working Class Unity

The problem confronting communists in Britain is not one of forging revolutionary alliances with other classes, but of winning the mass of workers away from reformism and uniting them in a revolutionary proletarian movement under the blood red banner of a Communist Party. The opportunists, on the other hand, see the problem as one of stemming Labour's long term and recently dramatic decline, putting them back into government and continuing on their stage by stage, long and winding 'parliamentary road to socialism'.

Hobsbawm and the Eurocommunists explain the decline of the Labour Party as being due to the decline in manual workers, and its failure to become a "people's" party of manual and white collar workers as well as the middle strata. They interpret this to mean that the working class has suffered a setback in terms of class-consciousness due to white-collar workers having greater affluence and privilege. This is a total distortion of the facts.

First, the Labour Party is not, nor never has been the 'natural party' of manual workers. Up to the 1930s, when manual workers constituted over 70% of the population, the reformist and working class vote was still predominantly Liberal or split between the Liberals and Labour. Today, the defection of working class votes to the Tories and the Alliance is not only confined to white collar workers, but has also involved manual workers. If we look at the way trade unionists voted in the 1983 general election, only 46% of manual union members voted Labour while 27% voted Tory and 26% Alliance. The fact that only 27% of white-collar union members voted Labour can also be accounted for by the fact that a mere 30% of women, as a high proportion of these workers, voted for Labour. To describe women workers as 'privileged and affluent', however, is a joke. They still receive only about 73% of the level for men's income and are increasingly being forced into the lowest paid part time jobs; in fact of 263,000 new jobs created in 1983/4, no less than 213,000 were of this type for women!

Secondly, the declining Labour vote is not due to a weakening of trade union organisation. Unionisation, despite the loss of 2 million members over the past five years from unemployment, is still close to 50% of the total workforce and historically higher than at any time in the first half of the 20th century, when workers unleashed their most militant strike wave after the First World War and voted overwhelmingly for Labour after the Second. Nor is Labour's decline due to white collar unionism being more right wing than industrial unionism. Unions such as ASTMS, and CPSA, NUPK, and Tass are far to the left of the AEUW and the FEPTU, which are two of the largest and most strategic unions in production industry.

Thirdly, to describe Labour's falling vote over the past twenty years as the result of a declining class-consciousness among workers is too simple, and to call the Labour vote "the best measure of class-consciousness" is, furthermore, a patent distortion and incorrect. A worker's vote for Labour reformism is more class-conscious than a vote for the Alliance's reformism in that the former is a bourgeois worker's party and the latter is a bourgeois liberal coalition. But it still illustrates a qualitative lack of

class-consciousness, if that worker votes for Labour as the best choice of three capitalist parties, and carries the illusion that Labour is a genuine socialist party. The defection of workers from Labour does express a decline in class consciousness in the most formal sense, but is also a negative response to the disillusioning experience of seventeen years of postwar Labour government; this has been an education for workers in itself, which the latter did not obtain before 1945; and which unfortunately, the Communist Party has failed to draw any positive lesson from but instead, continued to peddle the myth that "the future of socialism is through the Labour Party" (Hobsbawm, *Marxism Today*, March 1984).

The root cause of Labour's decline lies in the crisis of reformism, which is gripping British politics at the moment and turning them on their head. So long as the working class is trapped within the constraints of bourgeois politics, it has no other way to respond to the bankruptcy of Labourism than to abstain from voting, or to hounce back to the right like a rubber ball that has hit a brick wall. The key to breaking out of this dilemma is to develop a revolutionary movement by drawing workers into mass actions around economic and political demands, which are restricted not to what capitalism can afford, but what the working class needs, and begin to break down the bounds of bourgeois legality. This is precisely what the miners are beginning to realise and have already confronted the working class movement with the objective need and profoundly revolutionary demand for workers' self defence. The miners' struggle has also shown in a magnificent way how the conservatism and passivity of women, which emanates from the mind-numbing and energy-sapping drudgery of domestic slavery, can be broken down by drawing them into struggle alongside the men. It is in the context of drawing the working class into a resolute and militant class struggle and uniting the working class as one, that communists must seek to enter and to form alliances with the current dominant forces in the working class movement, not to tail reformist trade union leaders or to dissolve themselves in the mire of Labourism, but to strive to lead the working class in struggle and to expose through criticism the bankruptcy and treachery of reformist misleaders. This requires, however, that the Communist Party once and for all settles the question: what is the vanguard of the working class and what is its role?

### What is the Vanguard?

The Chatterite economist Ron Bellamy writes in his series of articles on the *Left Alternative Strategy* in the *Morning Star*: "Where, then, is the advanced section of the working class to be found, the section capable of mobilising the whole class, uniting it in struggle for increasingly fundamental aims?... These last named qualities mature most fully among workers in large-scale production (including the public production of services)." (*Morning Star*, October 28 1983).

Here we have a typically vulgar economist (in the Leninist use of the word) definition of the vanguard of the working class. For the Chatter group as a whole, this leads them to the conclusion of tailing behind the manual trade unions in large-scale industry and subordinating the political struggle for democratic demands to trade unionism in general. On the movement for racial equality, comrade Bellamy states: "Of course, every new movement is to be warmly welcomed. But some with a narrow class basis outside the working class, or among the latter's less stable sections, are marked by opportunism of right and left, or have a spectacular but short life, and only a limited potential for leading or constituting mass movements. Perhaps the patient and tenacious tortoise of

the TUC's anti-racial work will get there most surely and with more supporters than more flamboyant hares." (*Morning Star*, October 21 1983). And on the struggle for women's rights, he says: "...a key part has been played by the 3½ million women organised in the women's TUC, as well as the women's sections of the Labour Party and the Coop guilds... I have not posed one movement against another but rather stressed that in building the mass movements, without which radical advance is impossible, the labour movement is the decisive factor for building the widest possible unity".

Comrade Bellamy and the Chaterites who are well aware of the accusation of "Economism", as it is also used against them by the Eurocommunists, attempt to counter it by distorting Lenin's polemic against the Economists in *What is to be Done?* by earnestly declaring that "Trade unions are not confined to economics but are also political now", and furthermore, that "Economism is a reformist and opportunist stance in all fields of struggle". (*Morning Star* October 21 1983). This is simply an attempt to confuse the issue by throwing dust in our eyes. Lenin attacked the Economists, not for limiting the struggle to economics, for the latter also formulated the idea of extending the economic struggle into the political sphere, but of limiting the struggle waged by workers to one of trade union politics. Lenin argued that the working class by itself is only capable spontaneously of achieving a trade union consciousness, and that to attain the revolutionary consciousness of a class capable of waging a struggle on all class issues, not just its own, then this consciousness must be brought from outside the spontaneity of the movement by communists. An understanding of the importance to support the democratic struggles of the Irish or black people or women with revolutionary actions cannot be developed in the confines of trade unionism, because trade union politics by itself is bourgeois politics, as shown by the Labour Party. It is the role of communists to agitate, educate and organise workers in the revolutionary struggle for democracy in society as a whole, to take it beyond bourgeois legality and on to the final assault for state power, which makes communists the vanguard, and not trade unionists in large-scale industry.

The Eurocommunists counter the "Economism" of the Chater group's adherence to trade union politics much in the same manner as the Legal Marxists and Mensheviks opposed the Economists in Russia. The importance of waging a struggle for democracy is emphasised, of course, but for the Eurocommunists and the Mensheviks, this struggle is tied to the tail of bourgeois democracy, prevented from spilling out into unconstitutional violence or any illegality which may challenge the rule of the capitalist class. Oh yes, illegal trespassing at Greenham Common, or disobeying an unpopular trade union law may be condoned, but God forbid us from supporting riots, "bullyboy" tactics on pickets lines, or the "terrorist" actions of the IRA. "We only want to make a protest, to reform the system — not to overthrow it by force!". For the Eurocommunists, the struggle for democracy is a 'stage' which stops short of revolution and postpones the socialist 'stage' indefinitely.

The vanguard of the working class is not a definition of trade union militancy or any other form of spontaneous militancy; it is that section of the working class which is organised in and around the Communist Party and wages the conscious struggle for socialist revolution. To fulfill that role, it is essential that the Communist Party makes close contacts with the mass of workers and initiates mass actions in tactical alliance with those political trends which already dominate the class. Communists cannot act as a vanguard by standing aloof from the trade

unions, nor women's struggle for liberation and the fight for peace but it is imperative that we do not tail the present reformist leaders and unite with them in principle. By making open criticisms of the reformist, feminist and pacifist leaders we should expose them and offer the politically active masses an alternative revolutionary lead. Our aim must be to split the working class away from all of the treacherous misleaders and win it to revolution.

### Communists and Labour

In his *Marxism Today* article *Labour: Rump or Rebirth*, Eric Hobsbawm invites us to examine Lenin's pamphlet *Left Wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder* on the recommendation that it "repays careful reading even today". For all his academic skills with the written word, our dear professor should really give himself a slap over the wrist for not paying attention to his own teaching, because while Lenin's pamphlet covers the communist attitude towards the Labour Party, it does not support one iota professor Hobsbawm's thesis that the Labour Party is "the mass party of the working class". Hobsbawm does not have a monopoly on this idea of course, as it is enshrined in *The British Road to Socialism* and even the "ever so hard" *Straight Left* declares: "The Labour Party is our party too... it is a class based party, based on the class to which we give our loyalty." (*Charlie Woods'* pamphlet, p27). Lenin on the other hand called the Labour Party: "...a thoroughly bourgeois party, because, although made up of workers, it is led by reactionaries, and the worst kind of reactionaries at that, who act quite in the spirit of the bourgeoisie. It is an organisation of the bourgeoisie, which exists to systematically dupe the workers with the aid of the British Noskes and Scheidemanns." (CW, Vol.31, p.258).

The tactics expounded by Lenin in *Left Wing Communism*, of applying for Communist Party affiliation to the Labour Party and entering into electoral pacts to help Labour get into power, were not designed to secure our 'proper place' and unite the working class in one organisation, as *Straight Left* dishonestly claims, but on the contrary, to speed up the process of exposing the Labour Party's treachery and bankruptcy. This is in total contrast to the opportunist desires and longings of the Eurocommunists, *Straight Left*, Chater and Hobsbawm, to revitalise the Labour Party, to rekindle the illusions of those who have voted for the Alliance that Labour is better, and worst of all, to continue the dangerous and utterly reformist strategy of winning socialism through parliamentary and governmental alliances of Labour and communists.

The 'parliamentary road to socialism' is not new and was preceded in its adoption in the Communist Party's programme in 1951 by Eduard Bernstein's theoretical formulation in the book *Evolutionary Socialism* in 1898. Lenin remarked on this first emergence of revisionism from within the Marxist workers' movement in *What is to be Done?* in 1902: "France has justified its old reputation of being 'the land where more than anywhere else, the historical class struggles were each time fought out to a decision'... The French socialists have begun, not to theorise, but to act. The democratically more highly developed conditions in France have permitted them to put 'Bernsteinism in practice' immediately, with all its consequences. Millerand has furnished an excellent example of practical Bernsteinism; not without reason did Bernstein and Vollmar rush so zealously to defend and laud him. Indeed, if Social Democracy, in essence, is merely a party of reform and must be bold enough to

admit this openly, then not only has a socialist the right to join a bourgeois cabinet, but he must always strive to do so." (CW, Vol 5, p354).

Despite the use of terms "Social Democracy" and "socialist", which were interchangeable with "Communism" and "Communist" prior to the First World War, Lenin clearly stated the orthodox revolutionary Marxist position that participation by socialists in bourgeois cabinets was and is an act of class collaboration of the most overt and vile kind. Yet eighty years later, the *Morning Star* in chorus with all other opportunists in our Party greeted totally in the spirit of Bernstein the inclusion of four French communist ministers in the Mitterand government. It declared: "It is going to be a great contrast — the Thatcher government here in Britain struggling with the working class to drag our economy down into ruins, while in France the Mitterand government is working with the French working class to do just the opposite (sic)." (*Morning Star*, June 25 1981). Again, opportunism in France had put into practice what our Bernsteins had been theorising about for the previous thirty years.

The Mitterand government and its four Communist Party hangers on, virtually in parody of its Millerand predecessor, unintentionally exposed, yet again, the dangerous illusions spun by opportunism. Three years since taking office, Mitterand now presides over 2½ million unemployed and has squeezed the working class with wage freezes and austerity measures to the point where tens and hundreds of thousands of steelworkers, miners and immigrant car workers can no longer contain their anger and frustration with this so called workers' government. Mitterand has striven, the same as Thatcher, to improve the competitiveness and competitiveness of his own capitalism at the expense of the workers, and it is to the shame of the leaders of the Communist Party to have accepted the disgraceful Judas role of dampening down union militancy, as part of this process.

The leaders of the PCF have since paid for their betrayal of the workers' confidence and most basic interests with the communist vote drastically and tragically plummeting to near 10% — almost equal now to the reinvigorated fascist vote — and the four Communist Party ministers have been thrown out of office, thoroughly discredited and discarded like some worn out plaything.

To claim, as the opportunists do, that the strategy to elect a parliamentary majority of communists and socialist to form a government, and "to shift the balance of forces against the big capitalists and their allies" (BRS p44), is a Leninist strategy is a complete and utter lie. Lenin flayed the opportunists and centrists of Europe in *State and Revolution* for using the exact same formulation: "Kautsky will have to enjoy the pleasant company of the Legiens and Davids, Plekhanovs, Potresovs, Tseretelis and Chernavs, who are quite willing to work for the 'shifting of the balance of forces within the state power', for 'winning a majority in parliament', and 'raising parliament to the rank of master of the government'. A most worthy object, which is wholly acceptable to the opportunists and which keeps everything within the bounds of the bourgeois parliamentary republic."

"We, however, shall break with the opportunists; and the entire class-conscious proletariat will be with us in the fight — not to 'shift the balance of forces', but to overthrow the bourgeoisie, to destroy bourgeois parliamentarism, for a democratic republic of the type after the Commune, or a republic of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, for the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat." (CW, Vol 25, pp494-5).

It is quite plain for all to see, that

Lenin never at any time endorsed or supported the formation of reformist parliamentary governmental alliances between communists and reformists, but on the contrary, condemned it repeatedly as the pernicious and opportunist deception of workers by those in the pocket of the bourgeoisie. He only considered the use of parliament by communists as a tactic for propaganda purposes and always stipulated that any conditional support for a reformist government must only be used, in so far as that government has the support of the mass of workers, to open the eyes of those workers to the true reactionary nature of that government. For Lenin, the task of revolutionaries is not to reform parliament, but to destroy it and to replace it with revolutionary organs of workers' power.

In the latest edition of *The British Road*, Eurocommunists and right opportunists have introduced the idea of a series of stages, in which Labour governments do not immediately 'introduce socialism', but confine themselves to a mere 'democratic transformation'. This is an attempt to overcome the embarrassing problem, that no socialist or socialist/communist parliamentary government has succeeded in taking one step towards true socialism, and allows the opportunists to postpone socialism indefinitely; such governments are simply expected to pass a few reforms, as if we did not know that already.

### Communists and Alliances: Conclusion

The situation nationally and internationally is maturing rapidly and heading towards a profound and far-reaching political and economic crisis of the capitalist system. Communists will be confronted, virtually for the first time in Britain, with a very real opportunity to carry through a revolution, for the process which is working incessantly in our favour is the decline and decay of imperialism and the consequent crisis of reformism. Far from dying on their own feet, however, both imperialism and reformism must be combated and given a decisive push into the dustbin of history. And it is to this purpose that communists must develop great experience and skill in the sphere of using alliances, not as a principle, but as a revolutionary tactic.

The question of alliances for communists in Britain, where the working class is the overwhelming majority of the population and objectively the only revolutionary class, is a question of winning the mass of workers away from reformism and uniting in a mighty revolutionary proletarian movement, capable of sweeping the imperialist bourgeoisie out of power, paralysing the instability of the middle strata and establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat. It means winning women, blacks, those fighting for peace, to a revolutionary solution to their democratic demands and uniting them under the banner of communism. The economic and political demands of the working class masses must become nails in the coffin of capitalism.

Despite the increasing favourable objective conditions for revolution, the subjective factor, namely the Communist Party is anything but in a healthy situation. The decades of opportunism are now taking their toll, as our Party disintegrates into a myriad of liquidationist factions. Before our Party can yet again lead our class in battle and far surpass its previous achievements of agitating, educating and organising the working class on a day to day basis, it is imperative we put our own ideological house in order. This is why we must combat opportunism on all the issues of the day and reestablish the Marxist-Leninist principles underlying all important communist tactics, such as the question of alliances. Only then will we be able to reforge our Party anew, win the politically conscious workers to our ranks and prepare to lead the working class as a whole to socialist victory.

predominantly to a reformist strategy to establish a constitutional monarchy, or a republic by non-revolutionary and constitutional means. The working class must, he urged, not follow this path, but on the contrary, wage an independent revolutionary struggle alongside the revolutionary petty bourgeoisie and throw up its own organisations on the lines of the Paris Commune — which in 1905 it actually did do with the formation of the soviets.

Likewise, for the backward colonies, Lenin told the Second Congress of the Communist International: "... we, as Communists, should and will support bourgeois — liberation movements in the colonies only when they are genuinely revolutionary, and when their exponents do not hinder our work of educating and organising in a revolutionary spirit the peasantry and the masses of the exploited. ... If these conditions do not exist, the Communists in these countries must combat the reformist bourgeoisie." (CW, Vol. 31, p.242)

It is understandable in a backward, underdeveloped country, where the working class is an extreme minority, why it is of fundamental importance to form class alliances. For without mobilising or having the class support of the majority of the population, the working class would not have a chance of carrying through a successful democratic revolution. Yet even in countries where the working class is in the majority, it is often still possible and necessary to forge alliances in certain circumstances i.e. where the petty bourgeoisie, no matter how small, is still a revolutionary class.

It is quite clear that Lenin and Leninism places great importance on the struggle for democracy and demands that communists, as the party of the working class, forge alliances with other classes and class parties on the basis of having a common interest in the revolutionary overthrow of the old state machine.

Let us now turn to examine the situation in Britain and see whether cross-class alliances are justified on a revolutionary premise here. First, we must analyse the class composition of British society.

### Classes and Parties in Britain

Britain was the first country to undergo industrialisation during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and since then has reached the most advanced stage of capitalist development, in which the working class is the overwhelming majority of the population, and the ruling monopoly capitalist class has become an extremely minute fraction of society. Capitalists and proprietors, as a whole, shrank from 7% of the population in 1911 to a mere 3 1/2% in 1960s, whereas today, the bourgeoisie and self-employed petty bourgeoisie (including lump building workers) put together, only account for about 8% (under 2 million in numbers).

The size of the working class is more difficult to estimate, as the line dividing salaried workers and salaried middle strata is vague and indefinable by bourgeois statistics; many professions and white-collar occupations have constantly undergone proletarianisation this century; but the difference essentially boils down to the middle strata being well paid professional, administrative and managerial servants of capitalism, whereas the pay and conditions of white collar workers relies increasingly upon the organisation of those workers in trade unions, as well as the level of unemployment due to them not being favoured servants, but on the contrary, subjects of exploitation.

If in 1911, we treat white collar workers as more allied to the middle strata, the working class (manual) constituted about 75% of the population. In 1981, according to *British Labour Statistics*, manual workers and white collar clerical workers, etc, excluding managerial and professional staffs, still constituted 72%, which is a

conservative estimate of the working class as a whole, considering the fact that it excludes white collar workers like technicians, who are categorised as 'professional', but are mostly proletarianised. This leaves the salaried middle strata, excluding the bourgeoisie and self-employed petty bourgeoisie, as only 20% of the population at most and probably somewhat less.

The composition of all classes has changed with the development of imperialism i.e. monopoly capitalism, in ways which are not confined to just Britain, but are typical of all advanced capitalist countries. First, the proportion of the economy and workers in Britain involved in the production of commodities and surplus value, including agriculture, manufacture, construction, freight transport and energy production has persistently contracted in conjunction with the rising productivity of labour and the expansion of 'non-productive' service industries. Service industries are only 'non-productive' in the sense of capitalist production, of course, for while they do not produce surplus value in the concrete, tangible form of material commodities they do produce use-values for people. This trend first became noticeable in agriculture, which at the turn of the century, still employed 2 million manual labourers, but has now been transformed into a highly mechanised, capitalised process employing a mere 4% of the working population. Similarly, production industries in 1948 still employed over 50% of the workforce but have since declined to just 35% in 1982.

Secondly, the expansion of the service sector including retail, public transport, health and education has resulted especially over the past twenty years in a growing proportion of workers who are women, white collar and employed by the capitalist state. Women constituted under 30% of the workforce in 1911, of whom 2 million out of a total 5 1/2 million were employed in domestic service. By 1981, women formed over 40% of the workforce in all industries and services and have actually become the majority of workers employed in services. The majority of these new jobs in the service industries have been generated by the state, which is reflected in the rising proportion of state and public employees from just 24% of the total workforce in the mid-1960s to over 33% by 1982. The fact that these changes have also given rise to a growth of non-manual employment as a proportion of all jobs is best illustrated by the decline in manual jobs. In 1911, manual workers accounted for 75% of the working population; but by 1979, they were down to 47%, and this trend has continued reducing them further to just 42% of the workforce.

Finally, the concentration of production and the ownership of the means of production, especially since the First World War, has resulted in the expropriation of petty producers and shopkeepers etc, by the rise of monopoly and finance capital, and a reciprocal growth of professional and managerial middle strata, who run the economy and state on behalf of that ruling monopoly and financial oligarchy.

In Britain today, about 75% of the population is comprised of the manual and non-manual working class, with a predominant historical shift away from manual jobs and jobs for men and towards a higher proportion of non-manual jobs and jobs for women. The remaining 25% consists of the employer and self employed bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie proper and the salaried middle strata, with a historical numerical shift towards the latter from the petty and small bourgeoisie. The ruling monopoly capitalist class on the other hand must be counted in thousands not millions and its overwhelming dominance of power and wealth stands in startling contrast to its insignificance as a proportion of the population.

How are the three main classes in Britain — the monopoly bourgeoisie, the working class and the middle strata

(including the petty bourgeoisie and small bourgeoisie) — represented politically?

The party of the monopoly bourgeoisie is of course the Tory party, hence the truth in the saying "when the Tories are not in government they are still in power." This party represents the conservative and reactionary face of monopoly capital but draws mass support from the most politically backward and passive sections of the middle strata and working class. The Labour Party is orientated towards the working class but is run by and based upon the interests and reformist strategy of the privileged labour bureaucracy in the trade unions. When in power the Labour Party does not represent the interests of the working class as a whole, but attempts to manage capitalism on behalf of the ruling class and secure for the labour bureaucracy and aristocracy the maximum share of political and economic influence and privilege from the ruling class. The middle strata have acquired the same historical and political niche as the liberal bourgeoisie of the nineteenth century and are represented by the SDP/Liberal Alliance. The SDP represents that section of the middle strata which formally hitched its wagon to the Labour Party after the Second World War, as the most effective vehicle for liberal reformism but which since broken away with class polarisation and the resultant left pressure inside the Labour Party.

Both the Labour Party and the Alliance are reformist bourgeois parties, but with the important difference that the Labour Party is organised on and receives the electoral support of the broadly more politically conscious and organised section of the working class — a difference which is important for communists to understand if they are to use the correct tactics for winning those workers away from reformism and towards revolution and communism.

It is appropriate here also to mention the class basis of the different factions in the Communist Party, which we described in the article *Reforge our Party* (*The Leninist* no.7). The Communist Party originally represented the international revolutionary wing of the workers' movement in Britain, as a component of the Leninist Third International. Since its foundations, however, our Party has tragically fallen under the dominance of various opportunist trends, and only *The Leninist* continues to represent the revolutionary Marxist tradition, and objectively, the interests of the working class as a whole. The Eurocommunists represent the "camp followers" of the working class, namely that section of the middle strata which is attempting to infiltrate liberal reformism into the very heart of our class. The right opportunists, who have split into the McLennan and Chater factions, represent the reformist Labour bureaucracy in our Party, the former relying predominantly upon the Party machine at national and district level, whereas the latter receives the support of the majority of the Party's trade union officials. The centrists, who are also split between Straight Leftism and the pro-Chater/Costello centrists, represent a tendency in the international communist movement which vacillates between reformism and revolution, but is given temporary stability by the dominance of centrism in the socialist countries.

Finally, other left trends and groups such as Trotskyism, Maoism, the SWP etc, which we can just mention in passing, represent the petty bourgeois radicalism of a very small section of the middle strata, (this does not of course mean that these groups have no working class membership) which in an advanced capitalist country can still be won to a revolutionary movement i.e. student youth etc.

It is evident therefore that the revolutionary trend in the middle strata, the working class and even our own Party is extremely weak. Bourgeois reformism is the dominant political

ideology for the vast majority of the politically conscious working class and the middle strata, which is historically due to the imperialist bourgeoisie being able to afford social reforms and concessions from the proceeds of exploiting workers and peasants throughout the world. There is no question, however, that British imperialism's decline and decay is undermining the objective basis of reformism, and is creating the objective conditions for building a revolutionary movement. But is this the same for both the working class and middle strata? Will it be possible to win the middle strata in Britain to the revolution, as Lenin's Party won the allegiance of the mass of peasantry to the Russian Revolution?

### Who are "the people"?

The Eurocommunists often speak of the "people" and Hobsbawm states that the Labour Party must retain the character of a "people's" party. It is quite clear, once you become acquainted with their arguments, what they mean. In the main they mean the unity of the working class and the middle strata, and essentially look to this unity becoming crystallised in their hallowed 'broad democratic alliance'. They argue that this unity cannot rest upon the economic class interests of the working class, but that it must be forged around democratic demands for women, peace, blacks, the national question for Scotland and Wales etc. It smacks of a very superficial resemblance to the orthodox Marxist attitude to the democratic alliance of 'the people', but for that one missing vital ingredient — the task of revolution. Here is what Lenin had to say in *State and Revolution*: "... particular attention should be paid to Marx's extremely profound remark that the destruction of the bureaucratic-military state machine is 'the precondition for every real people's revolution'..."

"In Europe, in 1871, the proletariat did not constitute the majority of the people in any country of the Continent. A 'people's' revolution, one actually sweeping the majority into its stream, could be such only if it embraced both the proletariat and the peasants. These two classes then constituted the 'people'. These two classes are united by the fact that the 'bureaucratic-military state machine' oppresses, crushes exploits them. To smash this machine, to break it up, is truly in the interest of the 'people', of their majority, of the workers and most of the peasants, is 'the precondition' for a free alliance of the poor peasants and the proletarians, whereas without such an alliance democracy is unstable and socialist transformation is impossible." (CW, Vol.25, pp.421-2)

Here Lenin is discussing not only the necessity of recruiting the support of the peasantry for revolution, as the proletariat is still in a minority, but also the possibility of drawing them into a revolutionary struggle to overthrow the state, because they are oppressed either as a bourgeois class by an absolutist state, as was the case in France 1871 and Russia 1905 and 1917, or as a bourgeois class under national oppression, as was the case for the colonies. For Marx and Lenin, support for the revolutionary overthrow of the state was the "precondition" for such alliances of the "people".

The Eurocommunist concept of the "people", on the other hand, is unquestionably reformist. They pose democratic demands in a reformist manner, which is acceptable to the reformist middle strata; they demand 'autonomy' for the women's, peace, and black movements not because they are 'non-class' issues as is usually claimed, but because they want such movements to embrace the reformist middle strata. Nowhere is this more clear today than in their call for an "anti-Thatcher" alliance in which either the Labour Party must move back to the right to capture the Alliance vote, or the Labour

The Morning Star debates women:

# Break the Feminist Stranglehold

Geraldine Duffy

THE LETTERS column of the *Morning Star* in the recent period has been buzzing over the question of feminism. The debate was sparked by comrade Martyn Stevens who, in answer to an article published in the *Star* by Mary McIntosh, emphasised the fact that class is the crucial question for women's liberation.

It is worth noting, before examining this debate, that comrade Chater has consistently used the letters column to advantage and that he never hands it over to a debate unless it provides some benefit to his own political position. Given the fact that many letters to the *Morning Star* are suppressed because of their political viewpoint, and given Chater's bureaucratic record in general, the present debate must be viewed with some scepticism. Indeed it would not be surprising if the letters chosen to represent the feminist argument were purposely the most bleating variety as opposed to a more coherent view.

Nevertheless this debate can have some value for genuine communists in that it allows the feminist stranglehold over the women's question in the Party to be challenged. The degree to which feminist dominance exists was graphically illustrated at the National Communist Party Women's Conference in 1983 when comrade Sally Davison opened the conference with a confident "I can take it that we're all feminists here!" Again, in recent issues of *Marxism Today* an advert has appeared entitled 'The Communist Party — What's in it for Women?' in which five CP women give their views on why they joined the Party; Janie Glen, an EC member, makes the point that she joined the YCL and CP at an early age, she then comments "Both experience taught me to think of politics as boring and intimidating... Feminism changed me and although you ain't seen nothing yet it's changing the CP."

Well unfortunately comrade Glen is correct in that the degeneration of the Party has meant that feminism has got the Party in a half nelson over the women's question. So much so that some of the correspondents in the *Star* have felt perfectly justified in challenging the right of male comrades to intervene in a debate on women. The doyen of this trend is of course comrade Bea Campbell whose reactionary view that violence on picket lines is an expression of 'maleness' rather than class conflict is indicative of just how alien the idea of class war is to these femmes. Alexandra Kollontai (the only woman member of the Bolshevik Central Committee of 1917 and the USSR's first Minister of Social Welfare), had similar problems at the beginning of the century and her comments are worth recounting:

"However good the intentions of individual groups of feminists towards the proletariat, whenever the question of class struggle has been posed they have left the battlefield in a fright. They find that they do not wish to interfere in alien causes, and prefer to retire to their bourgeois liberalism which is so comfortably familiar."

This brings us down to what is in many ways the crux of the current debate: whether anti-feminism is to be equated with being anti-women because this is what the feminists would have us believe. In response to a letter by comrade Lesley Lewis criticising bourgeois feminism, comrade Maggie Bowden the Party's National Women's Organiser, had this to say:

"It is unfortunate that Lesley appears to equate feminism with



Do they fight for their sex or their class?

bourgeois ideology. Communist women have an important role to play in raising feminist demands in a way which makes the link between progress for women and the fight for Socialism."

In a deft move feminism is equated with "progress for women and the fight for socialism"; this is a distortion both of what feminism is and of the role communist women should be playing. It is an indication of the extent to which the Party has officially enshrined revisionism in that comrade Bowden and others can see no disparity between their arguments and those of Marx, Engels and Lenin.

The predominance of this view has enabled some pro-feminists to show their contempt for non-feminists:

"The mickey mouse Marxism of Lesley Lewis and Martyn Stevens will not help to bring about the political and personal transformation of the consciousness of people throughout our society — which is necessary if we are ever to create a Socialist society in Britain." (Alan Lane)

"Martyn Stevens' letter was riddled with unexplained labels 'bourgeois feminists', 'liberal socialism', etc, when really what he was trying to do was put women in their place... Reducing human relationships to economics and 'work' is to miss the whole point of Socialism. These men want a Socialism that is male-defined and male-run." (Mary Myles)

What these contributions demonstrate most clearly is an ignorance of and contempt for Marxism-Leninism bred by belief in the Disneyland distortions of the BRS. Likewise Leena Cope denies that it is class which matters:

"If the Women's Movement often seems middle class (and it does) that is because being middle class is having education, leisure, a LITTLE money, gives you better resources to think about 'issues', whatever they are... most women feel their WOMANNESS far more acutely than their 'class'."

This letter indicates most neatly the true nature of feminism i.e. the struggle of bourgeois women to unite and thus to rebuff the common enemy — men.

The feminists wallow in their self styled purdah but Marx, Engels and Lenin totally rejected this concept and Kollontai makes the point clearly:

"The women's world is divided, just as is the world of men, into two camps; the interests and aspira-

tions of one group of women bring it close to the bourgeois class, while the other group has close connections with the proletariat... Thus although both camps follow the general slogan of the 'liberation of women', their aims and interests are different."

Thus working women have no interest in uniting with their bourgeois 'sisters'; the miners' wives in the present dispute are not motivated by their 'womanhood' but by their class interests. This was made clear enough in *Communist Focus* when in an interview a member of a Miners' Support Group was asked if feminism had influenced the miners' wives — "No" was the stark reply. Class instinct, whatever the feminists say, always shows itself to be more powerful than 'above class' politics. Working class women do not reject feminism because they are willing victims of their double burden under capitalism but because unlike feminists they do not see men as the enemy. On the contrary the working class man and woman are enslaved by the same social conditions, the same hated chains of capitalism oppress them.

Only socialism opens the door for women's liberation and only communism is the achievement of it. This is what comrade Stevens and others recognise as opposed to the threadbare positions of such leading comrades as Betty Matthews who exposed her remarkable ignorance for all to see:

"Marxism is much more than a working class position. A liberal trade unionist can take a 'working class position', but that does not make him or her a Marxist."

To add insult to injury: "Poor old Marx, how his theory has suffered in the hands of some self styled interpreters."

Ignorant and proud of it! In answer to comrade Matthews comrade Dorothy Pragnell was quick to make the very basic point that Marxism is a working class ideology because it represents their interests not because all workers share this ideology, she adds "Instead of bemoaning 'poor old Marx' she should try to understand him more." Quite.

The fact that feminist views have come to dominate the Party on the women's question has not a little to do with the centrists' treatment of the issue. The centrists respond in a negative way against the feminists but do not respond to the women's question in a vanguard way. For example, at the last Party congress the women's question was not regarded as important

enough by the centrists to merit an alternative to the feminist resolution. It is not surprising therefore if feminists accuse the centrists of using 'class' as a label to bury the issue. Some inexperienced women actually end up in the feminist camp because of the conservatism of the centrists whose answer to feminism often does not go beyond the banal assertion that women have equality in the Soviet Union. The attitude that seems to predominate in these circles is that once socialism has been achieved then women will be equal.

It is for this reason that we would take issue with one point that comrade Stevens makes on the question of the family when he claims that the family ceases "to be oppressive after class exploitation and its effects are abolished." Surely, it is not a question of when class exploitation is abolished, as in the Soviet Union, but when class itself and the vestiges of class society are abolished. Lenin made this clear after the revolution:

"Notwithstanding all the laws emancipating woman, she continues to be a domestic slave, because petty housework crushes, strangles, stultifies and degrades her, chains her to the kitchen and the nursery, and she wastes her labour on barbarously unproductive, petty, nerve-racking, stultifying and crushing drudgery. The real emancipation of women, real communism, will begin only where and when an all-out struggle begins (led by the proletariat wielding the state power) against this petty housekeeping, or rather when its wholesale transformation into a large scale socialist economy begins." (*On the Emancipation of Women*, p.72)

The state of affairs Lenin describes still exist in the Soviet Union to a large degree, women still have the burden of housework to cope with. It does Soviet women nor the fight for communism no service to claim that even though the family is still a unit of consumption, it is not an oppressive institution for women. All this demonstrates is a conservatism, a fear of the idea of 'the abolition of the family', which gets in the way of appreciating reality.

It cannot be over emphasised that the women's question is not a side issue but is vital to the class struggle. Likewise it is only with the full liberation of women that the triumph of communism can be achieved where "the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all."



## Second Conference of the Leninists of the CPGB

# To the Utmost of Our Strength

Peter Butler

COMRADES forming the nucleus of *The Leninist* met last month for their Second Conference. Its decisions confirmed the growing potential for Leninism in Britain. Drawn from the ranks of the CPGB this Leninist core gave vent to the just and measured rebellion that is evident amongst members of our Party.

Never loth to accept the consequences of their actions, and indeed revelling in the challenge presented by *The Leninist's* revolutionary politics, Conference participants topped off the deliberations by deciding to levy themselves substantially. In fact the decision arrived at in the resolution 'On Finance' was a deliberate break with the old centrist and right opportunist ideas of easy money. *The Leninist* has no source of finance other than its own supporters and sympathisers, consequently they have to dig deep if Leninism is to break new ground in the opportunist morass that passes for the Communist Party.

The verbiage of opportunism has in the past belched forth on 'self sacrifice'. Even when this was a more ready phrase in our Party two or three decades ago the 'self sacrifice' might commonly be accepted to be missing out on an evening's TV or the occasional Saturday or Sunday — as it still is amongst numerous Party militants today. There is, however, a great deal more to the self sacrifice demanded by Leninism.

No-one is going to bail us out; we are solely dependent on ourselves to sustain *The Leninist* and its organisation: those statements are now imprinted on the consciousness of those comrades who attended the Second Conference of Supporters of *The Leninist*. The urgency of the tasks of *The Leninist* ensured that the question of finance was treated in a particularly serious manner at the Conference. The degree of seriousness we Leninists have brought to bear on the finance question may best be judged from the method agreed as a new departure for raising money: the Summer Offensive.

### The Summer Offensive

Faced with a voracious Tory government ready to attack every gain of the working class, communists in Britain have a heavy duty. This is not eased by the attitude to raising money prevalent in our Party. Many's the time a new recruit to our Party has groaned at the round of jumble sales, draws, and bazaars. What is needed now, though, and will be needed in ever increasing quantities in the future is a degree of commitment to revolution that transcends mere dabbling: Leninists must expect that they sacrifice not only their whole lives to revolution, but that financial sacrifice becomes the only way in which their politics can be put into effect.

To see the effect of such financial sacrifice we need only turn to the experience of our comrades in the *İşçinin Sesi* wing of the Communist Party of Turkey. These comrades have for several years held a more and more successful annual Summer Attack in which individual comrades have found themselves capable of raising large amounts of cash. This has meant that their organisation has, through revolutionary self sacrifice, achieved what many derided them for: a re-established Leninist tradition within their Party. Whether faced with a revolutionary situation or a reactionary period in Turkey, these comrades have not allowed themselves to be hampered

by lack of money in carrying out their revolutionary tasks.

In similar vein the Leninists of the CPGB cannot allow their political course to be determined by the problem of raising money for the tasks that beset them. All Leninists must expect to raise their level of self sacrifice to overcome the difficulties of obtaining the finance required for all that we must set out to achieve. It is for this reason that the Conference decided to institute our very own Summer Offensive in 1985. May Day 1985 has been set as the starting date for the Offensive, which will terminate at the end of that August. Its form will be the pledging of a certain sum by each comrade participating, with a minimum already decided by the Conference. That minimum was agreed as three weeks' wages for those comrades who are working and two weeks' income for those comrades who are unemployed or students. These minima were considered to be the absolute lower limit by the employed, unemployed, and student comrades who took part in the Conference. Comrades not yet supporters of *The Leninist* will be more than welcome to participate on the same basis when the time comes.

Many ways of raising these sums spring readily to mind: working overtime, summer jobs, casual work, selling possessions. Our comrades' inventiveness will no doubt suggest many more. And as a kind of dry run — though the expectation is that a regular stream of money will reach the coffers of *The Leninist* — there is now a mini-offensive going on amongst Leninists from the late summer into autumn. Practice makes perfect: so the means of achieving this mini-offensive's total will be built on to ensure a successful conclusion to next year's full scale offensive.

Our refusal to subordinate our politics to financial considerations is a sign of Leninism. Without this we would not achieve the expansion of *The Leninist*, further publications, or our intervention in the Party in an effective manner. All other decisions made so enthusiastically at the Conference hinged on the decision on finance, which was indeed agreed in a spirit of combativity and unanimity. Just what those decisions were that depend so heavily on the input of cash we shall now turn to.

### Leninist Tasks

Acutely aware of the burning need for a Leninist Communist Party and the profound crisis which our Party is currently embroiled in, the Second Conference of Supporters of *The Leninist* discussed at some length the nature of the counter attack on opportunism which we must initiate. The primary fact to be faced is that of the four trends within our Party only that around *The Leninist* is not opportunist: each of the other three trends is imbued with opportunism and is liquidationist to the core. The reformism of the Eurocommunist/McLennan factions, the trade union bureaucratic tailism of the Chater/Costello faction, and the crass Labourism of the Straight Leftists each in their own way is based on their own favoured edition of *The British Road To Socialism*.

Whilst the leadership gerrymanders the Congress in their wish to go gaily down the bourgeois path of 'think tank of the left' and the Straight Leftists revise Lenin and proclaim the Labour Party a genuine workers'

party. Chater/Costello and their centrist sheep bleat on about the *Morning Star* as a labour movement paper as if its divorce from the Party which gave it birth is its final salvation. On the other hand, the Second Conference considered that the urgent necessity of saving the CPGB from these liquidationist currents means we underline ever more strongly the absolute need for a Leninist-led Party.

Pro-Partyism dictates that there must inevitably be a lengthy process of struggle on the ideological plane. Accompanying this, the Second Conference declared an immediate aim of joining this to agitation within the working class and the resultant embedding of Leninists within our class. After all, a thorough cleansing of our Party of the disease of opportunism is most likely to be achieved through an influx of new members influenced by Leninism. Such an influx can squeeze out the opportunist pus.

The current miners' strike provides an example to Leninists: if we want to start producing revolutionaries who are cadres in the field of communist endeavour then the struggle of the miners is the primary focus of our resources and energies. Here much of our propaganda must emphasise ever more questions we have already touched on. Questions of how pickets are to be protected from the thugs in blue — those crackers of skulls so bold when faced with unarmed men and women. Questions of how to mobilise other workers around the call for a general strike not only in support of the miners but also as a blow against the gutting anti-trade union laws beloved of our rulers. And questions of forming Councils of Action as in the 1926 general strike from the already existing Miners' Support Committees that are beginning to prove their worth in solidarity with the miners. On all these and other current questions facing our working class movement we must endeavour to bring about a united workers' offensive which, given revolutionary perspectives, will be an important preparation for the struggle for state power.

The Leninists' Second Conference agreed to build on the advances for pro-Partyism exhibited at the recent PPPS AGM and by developing supporters through an educational programme. Both provide opportunities to maximise our potential.

Wider distribution of *The Leninist* is essential. Although a series of pamphlets will be produced as a result of the Second Conference, *The Leninist* is presently the sole and will continue to be the main vehicle for our propaganda and theoretical attack on the bastions of opportunism and for Leninism. Its importance in the fight to reforge our Party leads us to the conclusion that a wider readership is urgent, and must be a priority. Part of our work in the coming months will ensure that this plan becomes a reality.

### Morning Star and Straight Left

The June PPPS meetings must surely have dispelled any doubt on the score of Chater's attitude to Party disputes: when in Rome do as the Romans must be his view when he is top dog, if only for the day. He and his group are determined to push the *Morning Star* into the embrace of reformism as manifested by the trade union bureaucracy, and in the process trample all hope of the paper becoming

a vehicle for the pro-Party fightback. Where in its pages has it campaigned for recruits to our Party from the ranks of the striking miners? This was one clear demand made from the Second Conference.

Thorough dishonesty is the hallmark of *Straight Left*. As a paper it pretends to be of the 'broad left' when in fact it is produced by the most highly organised opportunist faction in the Party. As an organisation *Straight Left* is having its ups and downs, though mostly downs at the moment as is evident from the meanderings of what passes for its policy line. Stumbling from varied position to position we are shown a typically centrist current: flying wildly from revolutionary rhetoric one day in 'Woods' to disgusting Labourism in Andrew Murray's columns in the *Morning Star* the next. Its sham 'pro-Sovietism' is matched in gall only by its position on the nature of the Labour Party, on which it disagrees with Lenin's assessments of it as a bourgeois workers' party.

*The Leninist* will seek to intervene in the cosy centrist debate between the pro-Chater/Costello grouping and *Straight Left*. Both need to be shown up as the liquidationists they truly are, neither is pro-Party, and neither is principled. The trade union bureaucracy may be the true love of Chater/Costello but it is not a patch on the Labourphilia of *Straight Left*. Neither faction is capable of saving our Party. Nonetheless, we will continue to oppose the expulsion from the Party of centrists, including those from *Straight Left*.

### Young Communists

The effect of the Party's decline has been more than mirrored in the Young Communist League for it has all but ceased to exist. Leninist comrades within it therefore have a heavy responsibility. The Second Conference concerned itself with this serious situation at some length and decided that the salvation of the YCL lay in the current situation faced by the working class.

Measures which the Conference agreed were detailed. In general, however, the approach to YCL decline was considered to be recruitment of young militants on the basis of Leninism (especially young miners) and the propagation of our ideas through wider sales amongst other youth movements, some ostensibly revolutionary, of *The Leninist*. A revolutionary wing of the YCL is a crying need.

### Conduct of Conference

As with our First Conference earlier this year, the Second Conference of Supporters of *The Leninist* was held in an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust. All comrades who attended could put whatever point they wished without let or hindrance, subject only to the constraints imposed by the duration of the Conference. This meant that (as reported in the April 1984 *The Leninist* on the First Conference) each speaker in discussion had three interventions of ten minutes on each motion, with extensions beyond this with the consent of Conference. A comradely atmosphere was generated throughout the Conference that augurs well for the future of *The Leninist*, for Leninism, and for the fight to reforge our Communist Party for which we are determined to struggle to the utmost of our strength and ability.

## REVIEWS

Straight Left's  
Phoney  
pro-Partyism

John Mann

For Communist Unity pp6 nd.

FOLLOWING on its last 'samizdat' publication assessing the 38th Party Congress, *Straight Left* have now come up, in their usual stultifying 'adult centrists only' debate, with another typed and duplicated document assessing the 1984 PPPS AGM; and posted it to the selected few, who are considered to be vulnerable to their brand of argument — or lack of one.

*Straight Left* warns of the danger of another split, but to disguise its own opportunism and liquidationism, reduces this scenario to the question of a conspiracy by those who are consciously intent on destroying the Communist Party as "CIA" type agents of capitalism. Here we have a farcical repeat of Stalin's method of unearthing the "Trotskyite-Zinovievite-fascist plot" of the 1930s, a process designed to replace open ideological struggle as the Leninist means of resolving political and ideological differences with paranoia, intrigue and in Stalin's case, criminal acts. *Straight Left* resort to these methods, as a phoney portrayal of pro-Partyism, because contrary to its claim to want a return to "Leninist norms", it is incapable of going back beyond the centrist 'normalcy' of Stalin.

For *Straight Left*, it is inconceivable that "the issues of political division in our Party can be argued out

in terms of the independence of our daily paper from an elected EC, however revisionist". Yet this is precisely what Lenin did. Contrary to *Straight Left's* constrained view of inner-Party debate, Lenin did openly publish pamphlets and papers independently of Menshevik controlled Party committees, and took the debate openly into the workers' movement in general. Only by doing this could the Bolsheviks recruit workers into the Party on a Leninist basis and swing the balance against opportunism and liquidationism.

It is, moreover, complete hypocrisy by *Straight Left* to criticise the Chater group's lack of ideological mettle, when they themselves are even more guilty of both burying themselves in reformist labour movement activities, orientating their supporters towards the Labour Party through their monthly paper, and patently hiding the inner-Party differences from the working class, as well as members of the Communist Party itself. The warning therefore that supporters of a Chater split will "disappear into the Labour Party" within two years, smacks of irony and dishonesty coming from the lips of those who have worked harder than anybody else to dissolve communist work into Labourism — and are known to be responsible for a number of communists defecting to the Labour Party, because they have taken the politics of *Straight Left* to its natural conclusion.

*Straight Left* look on the disintegration of the Communist Party, not as the result of opportunism being a bourgeois ideology which grips the workers' and communist movement unless consciously combatted, but as a conspiracy of disrupters. They ask of the NCP split: "Was this an accident or were strings being pulled by people whose conscious design was the break up of the Communist Party in Britain?", when in reality, the premature and ill-conceiv-

ed split by Sid French was a result of the same disease suffered by *Straight Left* — an inability to conduct an open ideological struggle and a tendency to resolve differences by organisational means.

This tendency in *Straight Left* has led them to use the tactic of tarring its opponents with the brush of Trotskyism. This is not only confined to *The Leninist*, which Fergus Nicholson attempted to get banned from being advertised in the *Morning Star*, after the Euros had banned us from *Marxism Today*, but also that the "organised disruption" of the Chater group emanates from it having "no barriers to Trotskyism". In the case of Ernie Roberts, this same slur is used to explain to *Straight Left's* supporters why certain left Labour MPs have encouraged the *Morning Star* to split from communist politics, rather than admit to the fact that the left Labourism, which *Straight Left* has been courting, has always had an inherent interest in the dissolution of the Communist Party. The problem for *Straight Left* however is to play down the utterances of the more weighty figure Tony Benn, who has echoed Ernie Roberts, yet who is too important for *Straight Left's* Labourist strategy to slander in the same manner. Of course, the method of branding opponents with Trotskyism is an old ruse used to distract attention away from one's own rightist sins by playing up the diversion of leftism, and is being squeezed by *Straight Left* for all it is worth.

*Straight Left* calls for communists to unite in the struggle for a "normal" Communist Party and for the restoration of "the standards of the international communist movement". This completely neglects the fact that the "standards" of the international communist movement are not sufficient to overcome the crisis of our Communist Party. This is because the crisis is not confined to our Party, but imbues the international movement as a whole. *Straight Left* rejects the fact

that the international movement has disintegrated ideologically, a fact shown clearly by the recent differences between Romania and the Soviet Union over the Olympics, between Poland and the Soviet Union on the correct communist attitude towards the British miners' strike and between the GDR and the Soviet Union on the question of detente and trade relations with FRG. These are the latest in a long line of differences which have led to the emergence of Maoism, Eurocommunism and sects such as the NCP in the world communist movement, and which cannot be overcome simply by adhering to the axiom that "the Soviet Union is always right".

To overcome this crisis within the international movement, it is not enough to set the clock back to 1955, and pretend that the events of 1956 and after did not result from opportunism having been entrenched as early as the late 1920s and early 1930s. It is not enough to overthrow the present 1978 version of the BRS, simply to replace it with the 1951 version, when the latter already carried all the seeds and even fully-developed parliamentary roadist fruits of Eurocommunism.

*Straight Left's* call for communist unity is a hollow and deceptive phrase, through which it is attempting to maintain the loyalty of many of its supporters who feel distinctly uncomfortable about *Straight Left's* present course. Without clearly revealing the true nature of the opportunist and liquidationist process which is undermining our Party and without exposing its roots in the world communist movement to be the centrism of Stalin, it is impossible to build the "revolutionary communist party" which *Straight Left* rightly declares to be needed by the working class now. For us, there is no greater barrier to the reformatting of communist unity for a truly Leninist communist party, than the centrism and sham pro-Partyism of *Straight Left* itself.

Petrograd  
Armed

Michael Burns

S.A. Smith *Red Petrograd: Revolution in the factories 1917-18*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1983, hbk, pp.347, £25.00.

"THE toppling of the Romanov dynasty inspired workers with euphoria. They returned to their factories determined that the ancien regime would be swept aside in the workplaces, just as it had been swept aside in society at large." (p.54)

The period spanning the two Russian revolutions of 1917 is possibly the most instructive in history for revolutionaries. In scrutinising the mass industrial working class organisations formed during those historic months, Smith lucidly describes in detail the manifold and complex problems posed by the struggle for workers' power in the factories and ultimately in society as a whole.

The most prominent form of proletarian power to emerge from the cauldron of class struggle that reached boiling point in Petrograd, both in 1905 and 1917, was of course Soviets. Smith, however concentrates his attention on the mass industrial workers' organisations that sprang just as naturally from the revolutionary situation of February 1917 as did the Soviets; namely the trade unions, factory committees, workers' militias and Red Guards.

Trade unions had prior to February 1917 only existed sporadically in Russia, being subject to almost constant repression by the tsarist state (in fact unions were only born en masse during 1905). As a consequence unions were tiny, being so weak that "In March 1917, therefore, labour leaders faced the enormous task of constructing a trade-union movement more or less from scratch;" (p103). An enormous task it might have been but the absence of an established labour bureaucracy steeped in reformism undoubtedly "...facilitated the development of a revolutionary socialist labour movement." (p104) And such a movement grew at a spectacular rate in red Petrograd, so that by October the city possessed one of the highest levels of unionisation in the world. Not only that, the unions were not the conservative craft type prevalent in western Europe but were overwhelmingly industrial unions.

Parallel to and often preceding the mushrooming of the unions was the emergence of the factory committees which in contrast to the unions, concerned themselves with a far broader range of day to day issues affecting workers. Many factory committees set up commissions, typically covering areas such as food supply, labour discipline and drunkenness, culture and workers' militia. Considering that the Bolsheviks had majorities on many factory committees, the inclusion of "labour discipline" and "drunkenness" commissions might seem strange at first sight but the Bolsheviks distinguished themselves from the Mensheviks and others by relentlessly calling for genuine workers' power: "Whoever talks of the necessity of labour discipline and does not demand workers' control of capitalist enterprises is a

hypocrite and a windbag." (Yu Larin quoted, p92) But one of the most important areas of operation were the committees' formation of workers' militia.

The mark of any genuine revolution is the destruction of the old state machine; this Petrograd witnessed in February: "Police stations and prisons were burnt to the ground; up to 40,000 rifles and 30,000 revolvers were seized. The government police force was replaced by two rival militias — a civil militia, ...and a workers' militia, brought into being by groups of factory workers." (p98) Between the two militias there was rivalry "from the first", the civil militia being controlled by the municipal Dumas dominated by bourgeois parties and reflecting their aims. Though the workers' militias fiercely resisted attempts to absorb them into the civil militias, nevertheless their membership dropped from 10,000 (out of a combined total of 20,000) in March to 2,000 (out of 6,000) in May. A conference of workers' militias on 27 May derided the attempt of the Soviet Executive Committee (then still with a Menshevik majority) to achieve such an emasculatation by absorption claiming that the intent was to impose "a police force of the Western-European type which is hated throughout the world by the majority of the people, the poorer classes." (p100) The conference instead agreed to Bolshevik proposals that their militias be reorganised "as a transitional stage towards the general arming of the whole population of Petrograd." The intention was quite clear.

Yet another group of armed workers had been born during the February Revolution — the Red Guards. Though tiny at first, they spread and were deemed sufficiently dangerous by the

Soviet Executive to merit the condemnation that they were a "direct threat to the unity of the revolutionary forces" when a conference of workers was organised to spread them wider in April. The Menshevik controlled Soviet blamed the moves to create a city-wide network of Red Guards on "agitation by 'Leninists'" and that it revealed "a deplorable lack of confidence in the army." (p101) (a tune somewhat similar to those being sung by our opportunists today!). Eventually, in July the workers' militias were dissolved by the Provisional Government, but the Red Guards kept a low profile and were later to be the shock troops that led the storming of the Winter Palace and the ushering of a new era.

Smith rightly points out that the workers' militia "were a major achievement of the February Revolution, which guaranteed workers' power in the factories and in society at large." (p102) Perceptively he also makes the fundamental point that: "The experience of the militias illustrates the impossibility of drawing neat distinctions between the military, economic or political 'aspects' of the workers' movement." (Ibid)

But not only does this book provide a fascinating account of the real nuts and bolts of Petrograd politics, it also shows vividly how the Bolsheviks themselves played the key, vanguard role, eventually winning majorities in the factory committees, unions and the Soviets themselves in October and fostering the growth of workers' militias and Red Guards. Though the Bolsheviks never created such mass working class organisations, they provided the quintessential political leadership that made the great October Socialist Revolution itself.

THE miners strike has had a great impact, not only on the mining communities themselves, but throughout the workers' movement and the British left as a whole. From a period of post-election demoralisation and the defeat of the NGA by print boss Eddy Shah with his use of the anti-union laws, the masses have now gained new confidence. Inspired by the miners' iron resolve, working class militants have thrown themselves into supporting their struggle with enthusiasm and energy.

## Support and Solidarity

Working class groups and parties have raised money from their own members for the miners but the bulk of fund and food collecting has been under the auspices of the trade unions themselves, trades councils and in particular, various forms of support committees. Certain trade unions have raised generous amounts of cash and food, particularly those that have clashed with the government such as the print unions. That SOGAT '82 has managed to raise over £375,000 is an indication of the bitterness welling up against the Tories. Wider support has been expressed at the local level, for example the London organisations of SOGAT '82, NGA, FBU, TGWU, AEUW-TASS and USDAW on August 2 sent a convoy carrying £100,000 worth of food to Yorkshire. Large amounts of money have been flowing from literally thousands of workplace collections and levies. Apart from this healthy pulse of concrete aid, there have been the mass demonstrations in Liverpool, Birmingham (at Salfley Gates) and the regional TUC one-day strikes in solidarity with the miners by the South East Regional TUC (on June 27) and Yorks & Humberside Regional TUC which gave the miners and the movement a morale boost.

But it is the Miners' Support Committees that merit particular mention as it is they that involve the most militant rank and file workers, the political activists who burn for revenge on the Tories. Their genuine mass character is attested by the fact that in every city and major town in Britain, from Basingstoke to Blackburn, and Southampton to Salford there is some kind of Miners' Support Committee or Group.

In most areas the committee has been set up by the local trades council, otherwise by political parties or trade unionists on an *ad hoc* basis. Though in the majority of cases they have operated more or less independently of the trades council that set it in motion. Although in some places such as Sheffield and Birmingham, they have only the status of trades council sub-committees. Though the degree of involvement, activity and organisation will vary from town to town but there can be no excuse for having only monthly meetings at such critical times — as in Sheffield.

The Miners' Support Committees' activities have mainly been around the collection of much needed food and money on the streets and sometimes the staging of benefits or other social fund-raising events; this approach having even been enshrined in the title of one organisation — the Dundee Miners' Strike Relief Committee. While we would be the last to deny that such support is basic material class solidarity, and also plays an essential additional role of boosting the morale of the miners, it must be complemented by a much broader and higher range of actions. This can only be done if we transform Miners' Support Committees into Councils of Action type organisations, this means:

- The broadening of Miners' Support Committees by the election of recallable delegates from workplace organisations (trade union groups, shop steward committees) union branches, unemployed workers' groups, tenants associations, working class women's groups and all working class political and other organisations.

# Miners' Support Committees: Into Action

Bill Kernan

- The organisation of miners to speak at workplace meetings and the regular distribution of propaganda materials supporting the struggle: leaflets, bulletins, posters etc.

- The formation of Workers' Defence Corps, in order to protect meetings and picket lines. They should consist above all of unemployed workers and strikers, and should be controlled by Miners' Support Committees.

The miners increasingly see their struggle as not just against pit closures but as a political struggle against the government a perspective the entire working class has a vital interest in joining. As the political temperature rises, it becomes clearer and clearer that food and money solidarity has serious limitations. As Arthur Scargill has said: "We need more than finance, more than food — we need the physical participation of workers. We do not want pious words from the leaders of the labour movement. We want industrial action in support of our union!"

But to facilitate this we must amongst other things transform the run of the mill Miners' Support Committees into Councils of Action. Such militant broad-based fighting class organisations are not simply desirable, they are now a necessity for mobilising working class action at a local level which is essential to the total victory not only of the miners but the working class as a whole in smashing the Tories' anti-union legislation and bringing the Iron Lady Thatcher to her knees.

## Councils of Action

It was in August 1920 that Councils of Action were first established in Britain in order to carry out an act of proletarian class solidarity with the young Soviet Republic, when the Government threatened to transform its assistance to the counterrevolutionary forces of Wrangel until his Polish allies into open military intervention. Mass agitation by the Councils of Action and the threat of a general strike actually forced the government to pull back from its plans for direct counterrevolutionary attack on the first socialist state. Surely this was one of the finest instances of proletarian internationalism ever displayed by the working class in Britain.

But of course, Councils of Action are best known for the dynamic role they played during the 1926 General Strike. The breadth of their activities in organising working class activity around the strike is well documented but also worthy of mention is the way they operated independently of TUC guidelines in many towns and cities, issuing their own transport permits and mobilising pickets and Workers'

Defence Corps to the treacherous TUC's obvious displeasure.

## Communists in Action

The call for Councils of Action in 1926 did not however simply spring spontaneously from the working class but were campaigned for beforehand. As the official historian of our Communist Party, James Klugmann pointed out: "It should be noted and appreciated that the call for the Councils of Action which were to be the most important organs of struggle during the nine days of the General Strike came first from the Communist Party and the Minority Movement." (*History of the CPGB — The General Strike 1925-26*, p.103). In fact, as the impending strike drew near, such a call was one of the main propositions of the Party's statement of April 23.

Throughout the nine days, the Communist Party threw its small but vigorously active forces into the fight; where there were strong communist organisations, there the most effective and militant activity was to be found. Not only did communists frequently take the lead in the activity (and fairly often leading positions) of the Councils of Action, they also gave a general political lead in shaping a large number of them into really broad class fighting organisations: "...moribund Trades Councils were revived, and existing ones were broadened to bring in all types of working-class organisations, including political organisations, until they became real expressions of the whole local working class movement." (*Ibid.*, p.148-9)

Despite the Party making some clearly incorrect calls before the strike (e.g. 'All power to the General Council') it undoubtedly played a vanguard role in explaining the political nature of the strike and the need of defeating the capitalist state, in campaigning for and organising Councils of Action to set up Workers' Defence Corps. Our Party's proud record during the General Strike is undeniable to any honest observer. Because of its role in the strike, thousands of the most class-conscious workers, men and women, flooded into the Party that had won their respect — the Communist Party. Between its 7th Congress (May 30 — June 1, 1925) and its 8th Congress (October 16 — 17, 1926) Party membership increased from 5,000 to over 10,000. Furthermore, the YCL had, since its previous 3rd Congress increased its membership threefold to 1,800 (December 1926) and 70% of these recruits were young miners. What better demonstration of the Party's heroic role during the General Strike!

## Communists Today

From the first days of the present strike, many communist miners have

taken leading roles in the organisation of picketting and in the general running of the dispute. Outside the NUM itself many communists have thrown themselves wholeheartedly into the activities of the Miners' Support Committees. But excellent though this solidarity work is, there is much more that is demanded of communists — political analysis and political leadership.

Perhaps some of our more inexperienced comrades might have expected *Marxism Today* to have carried numerous articles analysing the political significance of the strike, extensive debates and their favourite round-table discussions between various communists and Labour lefts. Instead, in the last two editions (July and August) there is only one article on this historic class battle — that is an interview on the role of women. Of course we do not really expect much more from hard-core Eurocommunists as we know they hate fierce working class struggle especially violence and intimidation; for them class struggle is a quaint old-fashioned concept they occasionally bandy about after their genteel dinner-party do's with their fellow academics.

So much for *Marxism Today*, but what of the Party leadership, what is the position of our Executive Committee? Well, looking at George Bolton's report to the July EC, one is immediately struck by the almost complete absence of concrete proposals for the taking forward of the miners' strike, instead this miners' leader and Party chairperson contented himself with merely describing events and amongst these generalities, calling on Party members to "lift our solidarity activity to even higher levels." Comrade Bolton did actually pose the right question when he asked: "...what has to be done in order to broaden and widen every aspect of the struggle?" But he never answered his own question and nor did the EC as a whole after their weekend's deliberations. To prove our point we ask the reader to try and find one concrete proposal in the following extract from comrade Bolton's report:

"Other initiatives might be considered by the miners and all who support them. For example, certain local authorities are considering withdrawing finance from the police used up by their anti-NUM picketing activities. It might well be worthwhile considering having some progressive QC hold a Tribunal on this issue with miners participating. Then again, sections of white collar trade unions, and perhaps in particular the civil servants, are very much involved in dealing with miners and their families during the course of the strike. Could they be more involved in discussion about the strike and its consequences? The basis for progressive forces of the cultural world being involved is clear from the declarations of many groups and individuals to hold concerts in support of the miners."

What better indication of the bankruptcy of our Party leadership can there be?

The difference between the impact of the Party in 1926 and now is clear, it is the difference between a committed revolutionary Party that fought to lead the struggle, that called for Councils of Action and Workers' Defence Corps; and a party dominated by opportunism that tails the NUM leadership and the left-wing Labour bureaucracy and whose leadership appears incapable of giving the revolutionary communist direction the strike needs. This is why, today, communists need to follow the revolutionary lead of *The Leninist* to take this strategic and historic strike forward to victory.

- Fight for a General Strike in aid of the miners and against Tory anti-trade union laws!
- Transform the Miners' Support Committees into Councils of Action!
- Form Workers' Defence Corps!